



UNIVERSITY OF PARIS  
RATANBAI KATRAK LECTURES

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EMILE BENVENISTE

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# THE PERSIAN RELIGION

ACCORDING TO THE CHIEF GREEK TEXTS

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PARIS, 1929  
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# **THE PERSIAN RELIGION**





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## FOREWORD

*The following pages reproduce four lectures given at the Sorbonne in 1926 under the auspices of the Ratanbai Katrak Foundation. Personal hindrances have delayed their publication until the present time.*

*In this edition the lectures appear in the form they were delivered. Their object, outlined at the beginning of the first chapter, and also material reasons, have compelled me to be brief. As my task demanded choice and arrangement of material rather than originality, I have neither prolonged the discussion nor developed the bibliography beyond the requirements of the subject in hand. The last chapter alone, which involved a close examination of Plutarch's texts, has assumed more extensive proportions.*

*The Eastern words and names have been transcribed approximately. The Avestic forms have been freed from their traditional spelling and restored to their original form.*

*I have much pleasure in expressing my sincere gratitude to Dr. Katrak of Bombay who inaugurated at the University of Paris a series of lectures, to be held every four years, for the discussion of problems relative to the past of Iran. He has thus given kindly and valuable encouragement to Iranian studies.*

*I also wish to thank the Council of the University of Paris, which did me the honour of appointing me as the first lecturer. I should like to acknowledge also that the careful and speedy translation of my French manuscript is due to Misses Summers and Berry.*

# THE PERSIAN RELIGION

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## CHAPTER I.

### GENERAL DATA MYTHICAL DATE OF ZOROASTER

« The Persians, » said Strabo, « are the most illustrious of the Barbarians in the eyes of the Greeks ». Even if the Greeks had not had their attention drawn to the power of Persia by political necessities, they would have had other good reasons for regarding it with interest. Whether for the originality of its culture, or the particular form of its government, for the pomp of its court, or for the mythical past surrounding its early dynasties, for its education system, or for some other aspect of its civilization, Persia afforded the Greeks an ensemble of varied attractions which did not exist collectively in any other

Eastern country. However, it was not only its external appearances which appealed to Greek imagination. From Persia there came also currents of thought, echoes of mysterious sciences to which the Hellenic mind could not remain insensible. There was a very old association of ideas among the Greeks which connected « magi » and « magic » <sup>1</sup> and the science of astrology which fame attributed to Zoroaster caused him to be regarded in Greece as the typical astrologer <sup>2</sup>. Many are the thinkers who, like Pythagoras, according to tradition, have been inspired by Zoroaster <sup>3</sup>. The attention which the Greeks have always given to the observation of Persian customs was of necessity chiefly directed to their religion, the practices of which they could easily study in Asia Minor. Later, their observations together with the treasures of Hellenic traditions, passed to the Romans, who by the developement of their power were often to be brought into contact with the Persians and Parthians.

We are acquainted with Iranian beliefs through

1. See Ed. Meyer, *Urspr. und Anf. des Christ.* t. II, p. 74, n. 2.

2. As shown by the epithet « stargazer » (astrothutes) frequently applied to Zoroaster.

3. See the most recent statement by I. Lévy, *Légende de Pythagore*, 1926.

the Avesta, in which the critical research of the last fifty years has distinguished a heterogeneous collection of texts of different ages. Alongside the Gâthâs, old lyrical poems, emanating from Zoroaster himself, the Avesta is practically composed of the Yashts, hymns in praise of ancient divinities, and the Vidêvdât, « the Anti-demoniac Code », collections of religious and moral precepts whose chief object is purity. In spite of their antiquity which is obvious from the archaism of the language, the Gâthâs do not represent the most ancient phase of religion <sup>1</sup>. Zoroaster's religious reform endeavoured to replace by the worship of moral abstractions that of the old divinities of nature, those very divinities whose glories are sung in the Yashts. These hymns, although collected later, reflect therefore beliefs which are earlier than the Gâthâs, and which Zoroastrianism, after trying to banish, was forced to assimilate. Moreover in the absence of any chronological data, the interpretation of the Avesta has not yet succeeded in fixing precisely either the period and the region of Iran where Zoroas-

1. Lehmann, in Chantepie de la Saussaye's *Handbuch*, 2nd ed., II, p. 211 ff., and Meillet, *Trois conf. sur les Gâthâs*, p. 16 ff.



ter's cult held sway, or the development of Mazdeism in ancient Iran.

In this uncertainty, the evidence of classic authors would be an invaluable help to us. Since Rapp for the first time grouped and studied these texts <sup>1</sup>, they have often been examined even in the most minute detail. But the results do not always correspond to the effort expended, and on the essential points the interpretations are sometimes contradictory. On reading Clemen's book (*Die griechischen und lateinischen Nachrichten über die persische Religion*) one cannot help doubting the value of evidence which could serve to support such varied theories. As there is no longer a text to discover, nor an unpublished comparison to point out, it would seem useless to undertake anew an investigation which has been made so often, and presumptuous to think of completing it in so few pages. But the present study has a different end in view. Without wishing to teach Iranian specialists anything, the author has attempted to summarise concisely, for historians of antiquity and the classical religions, the facts which have been proved as a result

1. Rapp, *Z.D.M.G.*, 1865, p. I ff.; 1866, p. 42 ff.

of discussions which were often confused. How is it that texts which appear to be precise and full of extraordinary detail, allow of only such vague conclusions? Since one can blame neither the insufficiency of the research nor the quality of the scholars who have conducted it, it is perhaps due to faulty method that the issue has been clouded.

The evidence of the ancients has always been examined as a whole, as if it belonged to the same period and relied on the same sources. The most varied texts have been combined. Is it surprising then, that they contradict one another, and will not the reduction of these contradictions depend on arbitrary choice? Is it feasible that several Greek historians, separated from one another by centuries and drawing conclusions from personal observation, should have the same reality before their eyes? Besides, is not the Avesta, to which the ancient texts are referred to prove their authenticity, itself open to severe criticism, since it is possible to discern in it the conflictor the confusion of Mazdeism, Zervanism and Zoroastrianism? It is therefore unlawful to speak of *one* Iranian religion or even of *one* Persian religion. Iranian beliefs have known throughout

the extent of a considerable Empire and through centuries with a very troubled history, the most varied vicissitudes, which the rigid Mazdean tradition of the Sassanid theologians hides from us.

The only way of reaching a definite reality from these ancient texts, is to examine them *individually*, and compare them with the Iranian texts. But their multiplicity must not lead our inquiry into by-paths. For the ancient period Latin authors are dependent on the Greeks, and in the Greek texts themselves, I have confined myself to the main point, to the enlightening details found in comparatively wide expositions. Without neglecting fragments which are often valuable, I have taken, one by one, the four chief texts to submit them to a careful analysis. Those who desire a more extensive documentation will only have to refer to the work of Clemen which, while leaving much to be desired from a critical point of view, gives a great number of useful references. Our study, being concentrated on the religious facts observed by the Greeks, has left aside that which concerns the internal study of the religions of Iran. Thus, the numerous traditions of the Greeks regarding Zoroaster can be profitably examined only with the help of the parallel tradi-

tions handed down by Iranian writings, and could not possibly be separated from the problem of Zoroaster in its entirety. Likewise for the question of the Magi.

At least one tradition, however, is peculiar to the Greeks: that which places Zoroaster five thousand years before the Trojan war or more often six thousand years before Plato. It is very simple, too simple to reject this date as a mythical one. It would be more profitable to try to discover to whom this « myth » is due and under what circumstances it could have arisen. If the problem admits of a solution, this will perhaps enlighten us upon the idea which the Greeks had of the person and role of Zoroaster.

According to a tradition, handed down by Plutarch and which will be examined further on<sup>1</sup>, the religion of the Magi, founded by Zoroaster, recognizes at the beginning of the world and over a long period, the co-existence and hostility of two principles: that of Good, Ohrmazd, and that of Evil, Ahriman. From their struggles arise the alternate prosperity and adversity which the world experiences. All that is done in favour of

1. Ch. IV, p. 72 ff.

the one or the other — obedience to its principles, prayers, sacrifices — strengthens it and increases its chances of victory. The phases of this struggle are determined by an exact calculation : for three thousand years Ohrmazd and Ahriman will reign alternately, and for a further three thousand years they will dispute the supremacy and endeavour to ruin each other's creations. Ohrmazd will be victorious and the human race will find happiness once more.

Now, the conception of a Zoroaster born six thousand years before Plato had certainly arisen in the heart of the Academy, for it prolongs the probable influence which the doctrines of the Magi, by ways still unknown to us, had exercised on the teaching of Plato himself <sup>1</sup>. It is in Plato, in the First Alcibiades <sup>2</sup>, the authenticity of which has been wrongly contested (written about 390 B. C.) that appears the first definite mention of the name of Zoroaster in Greece, and here also the interest which Plato took in the doctrines circulating under the authority of the Magi first manifests itself. Towards the end of his life, Plato shows in the « Laws » the importance which

1. See Reitzenstein, in *Vortr. d. Bibl. Warburg*, 1924-25.

2. *Alcib. I*, 121.



the distinction between the opposing realms of Good and Evil assumed in his eyes <sup>1</sup>. Although the oldest Greek philosophy delighted in regarding the world as the product of two opposite principles, it is difficult not to admit in presence of the unanimous statements of Plato's disciples, that he at least knew, even if he did not adopt, the dualistic conceptions of the Magi. It is to Eudoxus of Cnidus, one of Plato's disciples, that Pliny attributes the tradition of the six thousand years between Zoroaster and Plato <sup>2</sup>. Aristotle, in a fragment from his treatise « On Philosophy » reproduced the teaching of the magi on the good and the evil spirit (Zeus or Oromasdes and Hades or Areimanios) <sup>3</sup>. One of the oldest passages of his « Metaphysics » where he deals with the fundamental principle of things, according to the leading thinkers, quotes among the number of the forerunners of Plato, Pherecydes in Greece and the Magi in Asia <sup>4</sup>. Plutarch introduces in the following terms his exposition of dualism : « If nothing can be done without a cause, and if

1. *Leg.* X, 896 E.

2. *N. H.* XXX, 1, 3.

3. *Ap. Diog. Laert. Proem.* 1, 8.

4. *Metaph.* XIV, 4, 1091 B.

that which is good cannot possibly become a cause of evil, there must be in nature a particular principle which gives rise to evil, as there exists one for good. That is an opinion adopted by the greatest and most enlightened of the philosophers<sup>1</sup> ». Whether Plutarch is inspired or not by the preceding passage from Aristotle, it is certain that among the greatest philosophers both Plato and Zoroaster are included.

The Greeks were aware of these traces of foreign ideas which they thought to recognize in their systems. One of their oldest cosmogonies rested on the Orphico-Pythagorean notion taken up by stoicism, of the constant return of things in the cycle of the great year<sup>2</sup>. The world, obeying an internal force, proceeds towards a universal conflagration which is followed by a renewal of everything in the place, order, nature and duration which it had before, and is to end once more in the general upheaval. The gods were bound by this cosmic necessity as much as mortals. Eudemus of Rhodes said in a lesson : « If the Pythagoreans are to be believed, one day,

1. *Is. et Osir.* Ch. 45.

2. On the whole question see Gomperz, *Griech. Denk.*, I, p. 65 ff.

with my stick in my hand, I shall be talking with you who will be seated once more in front of me as now, and it will be the same with everything else.» Was not one to deduce from, this that ideas, virtues, and the men who symbolise them have also their periodic and necessary return? — a conception which Nietzsche has expressed in splendid images <sup>1</sup>, and of which Svante Arrhenius has made the basis of his astronomical theories. Theopompus in the VIIIth book of his *Philippics*, asserts that such also was the teaching of the Magi: according to them, men will live again and be immortal, and all things will remain under their present names <sup>2</sup>. Eudoxus and Hecataeus have expressed the same idea.

Now, the fame of Plato, so widespread during his lifetime, began in the course of years and through the fervour of his disciples, to acquire a symbolic and almost religious value. He became a figure which grew ever greater and greater, and finally developed into a sort of philosophical creator who had condescended to assume human form. A single illustration will suffice. In Plutarch's *Banquet*, several guests, discoursing

1. Andler, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, 1928, p. 225 ff.

2. Ap. Diog. Laert. *Prooem.* I, 8.

of Plato on the occasion of the anniversary of his birth said that it was no insult to Apollo, to call Plato his son. <sup>1</sup> Zoroaster enjoyed a reputation that was equally great but more mysterious. His fabulous antiquity, his miraculous birth, the life of meditation which for twenty years he spent in the desert, living on milk, and above all his astrological reputation, combined to give him a strange and superhuman character<sup>2</sup>.

Let us now group these data. The Greeks united the two cosmogonic principles, the long period and the constant return. More exactly, they grafted the necessity of regular return of men and ideas on the long period. Since, according to what they learnt from the Magi, the great cycle of twelve thousand years is divided into two periods of six thousand years, the first of which is marked by the appearance of Zoroaster, the relationship between Zoroastrian and Platonic dualism, as well as the law of nature, had to bring back, at the end of the second period of six thousand years, a representative of the same ideas <sup>3</sup>.

1. *Quaest. conviv.*, VIII, 1, 2.

2. See the Greek references in Jackson's well-known *Zoroaster*, p. 231.

3. Long after I had delivered these lectures and written the first chapter, I discovered that in 1923, W. Jaeger

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Everything happens as if the disciples of Plato, urged by a desire to find an origin for themselves as far back as possible, had obscurely made Zoroaster a precursor of Plato, or Plato a reincarnation of Zoroaster.

in his admirable *Aristoteles* had already raised the same question in a similar manner, but with a far wider outlook on the connexion between Iranian and Greek ideas and with more copious comparisons. I advise the reader to consult his work on p. 133-138.



## CHAPTER II

### HERODOTUS

Although Herodotus does not give any definite indication of this information, it appears very likely that he has been in Persia or the immediate neighbourhood of Persia, and that he takes from personal observations the remarks which he has incorporated in the first book of his History<sup>1</sup>. He scrupulously distinguishes what he knows from having seen it with his own eyes, from what he has been told. Moreover, the better one knows the periods and countries that Herodotus describes, the better one realizes the exactitude and truth of his observations, if not of his interpretations<sup>2</sup>. We are therefore within our rights in sup-

1. How and Wells, *Comm. on Herodotus*, I, 20.

2. The reliability of Herodotus has been appreciated recently by specialists like Delitzsch, *Festschr. Ed. Sachau*, p. 88; Nöldeke, *Klio*, XVIII, 1923, p. 1 ff.; Spiegelberg, *Die Glaubwürdigkeit von Herodots Bericht über Ägypten*, 1923, p. 36 ff.

posing that the beliefs which he describes and some of which at least, having survived in Asia Minor, were familiar to him, may be placed about 445 B. C., — nearly half a century after the death of Darius, who ordered the setting up of those monumental inscriptions in which his victories are commemorated and the gods extolled in three languages. We have therefore to question from a twofold point of view : Is the religion which he attributes to the Persians that of Zoroaster or that of the Achemenids ? This will lead us to discuss a third question : Is even the religion of the Achemenids that of Zoroaster ?

The essential point of the evidence of Herodotus is contained in the three following chapters :

*I. 131.* « Now the Persians I know to have the following customs. They count it unlawful to set up images and shrines and altars, and actually charge them that do so with folly, because, as I suppose, they have not conceived the gods to be of like nature with men, as the Greeks conceive them. But their custom is to ascend to the highest peaks of the mountains, and offer sacrifices to Zeus, calling the whole vault of the sky, Zeus; and they sacrifice also to Sun, Moon, Earth, Fire, Water and Winds. To these

alone they have sacrificed from the beginning ; but hey have learned in addition, from the Assyrians and the Arabians, to sacrifice to Urania. (The Assyrians call Aphrodite Mylitta, the Arabians Alitta, the Persians Mitra.)

132. Now the manner of the Persians, sacrifice to the gods afore-named is this. They neither make them altars nor kindle a fire when about to sacrifice ; they use no libation, no flute, no garlands, no meal. But as one desires to sacrifice to each of these deities, he takes the victim to a pure place and calls upon the gods, his headdress adorned with a garland, generally of myrtle. It is not permitted him to ask for good things for his own private use who sacrifices ; but he makes petition for good to befall the whole Persian people and the King, for he also counted with the whole Persian people. Then when he has cut up the victim and seethed the flesh, he spreads out a carpet of the tenderest herbage, especially clover, and sets all the flesh thereon. And when he has thus disposed it, a Magian man stands by and chants a theogony thereto, for such the Persians say the chant is. Without a Magian it is not lawful for him to offer sacrifices. And after waiting a little time, the sacrificer takes away the flesh and uses it as he will.

140. This much I can say about the Persians from exact knowledge. Other things are talked of as secrets and not openly, with regard to the dead — how that the corpse of a Persian is not buried before it has been torn by bird or dog. Now I know the Magi do this, for they do it without concealment; but the Persians cover the corpse with wax and bury it in the earth. But the Magi are very different from other men, and especially from the priests in Egypt. The latter hold it a sacred duty to slay no living thing, save what they sacrifice; but the Magi slay with their own hands all animals except a dog and a man, and they make this an object of rivalry, slaying alike ants and snakes and other reptiles and birds. As to this custom, let it stand as it has been practised from the first; but I will return to my former subject. <sup>1</sup>».

Whoever has even a summary knowledge of the religion of Zoroaster in accordance with the Avesta, will notice at once what this text does not point out, rather than what it does. One cannot fail to be impressed by the absence of all that characterises the Avestic system: there is

1. Transl. Moulton, *Early Zoroastr.*, p. 391.

a complete ignorance of Zoroaster, not a single allusion to the role of the « hauma », the divine plant whose sweet-smelling sap was used for libations, nor to the worship of the ox, nor to the central position of fire in the cult, any more than to the essential principles : dualism in the cosmic order, purity in the moral realm. The exposition of Herodotus is foreign to the Zoroastrian system. But as we have already pointed out, the Avestic religion includes some parts bearing the impression of the beliefs which Zoroaster had attempted to discard and which though later in combination, are earlier in foundation, than the reform. There is therefore reason to ask whether the evidence of Herodotus would not agree with these traces of the old Iranian religion. The examination of the details of the text bears out this supposition.

The historian tells us of animal sacrifices on mountain tops, of the very offerings which the Zoroastrian reform wished to banish, but the persistence of which is proved by mentions made of them, relative to several gods and heroes in the Yashts; animals are sacrificed to Mithra <sup>1</sup>, to Tishtrya <sup>2</sup>; the goddess Druvâspâ, the guardian

1. Yt. X, 119.

2. Yt. VIII, 58.



of flocks, is propitiated by several legendary personages, with sacrifices of horses by the hundred, oxen by the thousand, sheep by the myriad, and several of these offerings are made on the mountain top<sup>1</sup>. The principal gods enumerated by Herodotus are all part of the Avestic pantheon : the sun (Mithra), the moon (Mâh), the earth (Zam), fire (Âtar), water (Apâm Napât), the wind (Vayu). These divinities are praised in the most important Yashts which exalt their origin, their attributes, their deeds, often with a wealth of detail and allusion proving at the same time the antiquity of their cult and the persistence of their survival in the popular religion. But none of them is mentioned in the Gâthâs, the gospel of the Zoroastrian worship.

Furthermore, the Persians would have learnt from the Assyrians and the Arabs to worship Ourania, called by the latter Alilat and Alitta, under the name of Mithra. It is universally admitted that, by a rather strange confusion, due perhaps to the fact that these two divinities formed a pair, Mithra occupies here the place of Anâhita, who in Iranian beliefs was an incarnation of war-

1. Yt. IX, 3, 17. Cf. Appian, *Mithrid.*, 66.

like valour as well as wisdom and fecundity <sup>1</sup> and who enjoyed in Asia Minor, where probably her origin is to be sought, an unrivalled fame <sup>2</sup>. The Greek Anaïtis whom we shall find again when dealing with Strabo, and the middle-Persian name, Anâhit, of the planet Venus, prove it.

Over her reigns the Supreme God, represented by the vault of the heavens. Many scholars have been mistaken over the meaning of this phrase, which has led some to trace under the names of Dia, the Iranian equivalent of the Vedic Dyauh <sup>3</sup>. Herodotus simply says the manifestation of the Supreme God is the celestial dome. He is identified with the heavens as each other divinity with an element. This is only one example among several, of the tendency often noticeable among the Greeks, and later, the Latins, to invest foreign divinities with the names of their own gods, or rather to recognize their divinities under foreign names. A closer parallel is supplied by the inscription of Antiochus I. of Commagene <sup>4</sup> in which the Iranian

1. Below, p. 61 and Dhalla, *Zor. Theol.* p. 137.

2. Below, p. 63 and Ed. Meyer, in Roscher's *Lexikon* s. v. Anaïtis.

3. Moulton, *op. cit.*, p. 392 n.

4. Dittenberger, *Orient. graec. inscr. select.*, I, 591.

gods are coupled with their Greek equivalents : Zeus-Oromasdes, Apollo-Mithras, Artagnes-Heracles. The Arsacid sovereigns, so strongly imbued with Hellenic influence, had their coins engraved with the title of DiosHuiois (son of Zeus), meaning Ohrmazd. On a Sassanid bas-relief, Ohrmazd is represented conferring the sovereignty on Ardashîr, and the inscription reads : « This is the picture of the God Ohrmazd (Dios theou) <sup>1</sup> ». It is certainly Ahura Mazda that is spoken of in the text of Herodotus under the disguise of Zeus, and who, like him, is represented by the luminous vault, according to Greek ideas, while the Persians saw in him only the creator of heaven and earth <sup>2</sup>. He is one of the principal figures in the old Avestic religion, whom the Gâthâs put in the foreground, and who, as will be shown later, is earlier than both the Mazdean faith properly called and the Zoroastrian reform.

From now onwards, we are allowed to think that the Persian religion which Herodotus knew is not that of Zoroaster, but the primitive form of

1. Darmesteter, *Z. A.*, I, p. 8 n.

2. « Ahuramazda who created this earth and that heaven ». says Darius in the Naxsh-i-Rustam inscription (Weissbach, *Keilinschr. d. Achâm.*, p. 86).

the Iranian religion, thoroughly impregnated with polytheism and paying homage to the deified forces of nature. We are here nearer Vedic beliefs than the Zoroastrian system.

To these beliefs correspond certain definite practices. In the account of Herodotus we shall set aside for the moment the statement relative to the absence of temples and the mention of the Magi. But from the fact that without Magi there are no sacrifices, and that the sacrificer must pray for the king and the whole Persian people, it follows immediately that we are here in front of the official form of worship. Moreover, there are neither libations (and therefore no invocation to Hauma) nor fire, which contradicts the very principle of Mazdeism. The mage usually wears a crown of myrtle, a specifically Persian custom, probably of Asianic origin, whereas in Avestic ritual as still practised by the Parsees, the priest must have his head covered (which may be compared with the Latin instruction to sacrifice *operto capite*, as a sign of segregation) and the lower part of his face veiled so that his breath may not pollute the fire <sup>1</sup>. When the

T. See the figure in Darmesteter's *Z.A.*, I, fig. IV and VI.

victim has been sacrificed, its flesh is boiled and strewn over a bed of herbs. This fact takes us back once more to Vedic India, where the victim was stretched out on a bed of herbs, the *barhish*. The corresponding Avestic word *barzish* means only a cushion, and has lost its religious significance<sup>1</sup>. Finally the mage chants a theogony. Later also, Pausanias reports that the Magi chant in a language unintelligible to the Greeks, as they read from a book<sup>2</sup>. What might this theogony be? It is singular that certain scholars should have thought of the Gâthâs, for, neither by their contents nor by the general tenor of the beliefs which produced them, can these compositions have anything in common with the celebration of a sacrifice. All the details which we have gathered lead us to think of the Yashts which on the one hand correspond to a certain degree to the liturgical hymns of the Vedas, and on the other, lent themselves by their style to such recitation. Do we not often find in them as a refrain this phrase : « We are sacrificing to such and such a divinity » ? The word « theogony » is not incorrectly applied to hymns in which the relationship and glorious deeds of the gods are frequently sung.

1. Bartholomae, *Altir. Wörterb.*, col. 950.

2. Paus. V, 27, 6.

From these corroborative indications it follows that we are observing in Herodotus a form of religion, which, in beliefs and practices, conforms in its broad outlines to what must have remained in ancient Iran of the Indo-Iranian pantheism and nature worship, entirely based on sacrifice. To ancient traditions are added particular customs, coming from other nations. As the worship of streams occurs in most of the countries bordering on Iran <sup>1</sup>, it is difficult to decide here whether it is a borrowing or a survival, the latter supposition being the more plausible. But other characteristics have a more distinctly foreign origin: the custom of covering dead bodies with wax to preserve them and prevent pollution is attributed to both Babylonia and Scythia.

It is well worth laying stress on the burial of bodies which is a mortal sin in the eyes of a Mazdean. But Herodotus introduces a distinction, the correctness and importance of which have not always been sufficiently realized: the Magi alone, that is to say the Medes, not the Persians, throw the corpses to the dogs and birds <sup>2</sup>. As this cus-

1. Waser, *Realencycl.* of Pauly-Wissowa, s. v. *Flussgötter*, col. 2780.

2. This important distinction is found even in late writers like Bardesane (see Nau, *Rev. hist. relig.*, 1927, p. 174).



tom is also attributed to the Caspians and Bactrians<sup>1</sup>, it must, in all probability, be peculiar to the ancient Iranian tribes, who led a nomadic existence in the steppes of the North and set up as a religious principle a necessity arising from the climate and their type of existence. But in still more ancient times, in the era of Indo-Iranian unity, the bodies were burnt. To fight this practice which is repeatedly and vigorously attacked in the Avesta, Zoroastrian reform established as a law of religion a custom probably from Central Asia. But, even if this prohibition did not show us that the burning of bodies was widely practised, even if other facts with which we shall deal later did not also confirm it, there would still remain a decisive proof: the word *daxma* which from the Avesta down to our own times means the high place where the bodies must remain exposed to the birds, originally meant « pyre ». Here again, Persian customs do not agree with Avestic ordinances.

Finally, when the Magi consider it lawful to sacrifice any living thing except man and dog (the omission of the ox is extremely significant)

1. Strab. XI, 3, 517; Justin, *Epit.* XLI, 3, 17.

and look upon it as a duty to destroy serpents and insects, winged and creeping creatures, they seem to obey the precepts of the Vidêvdât which in fact must be themselves inherited from popular beliefs. From these destructions we may suppose that the magi believed in an evil world, thence perhaps adhered to the principle of dualism (see Ch. IV), but not to monotheistic Zoroastrianism. It is a further characteristic in which the beliefs of the Median Magi differ both from the Persian religion and from that of Zoroaster.

The Persian religion according to Herodotus has then in common with that of the Avesta, only the most ancient features of the latter, survival, of the old Indo-Iranian unity, several of which are still recognizable in the Avesta, in spite of their altered form.

But a parallel study of the Greek and Avestic texts can receive valuable help from the inscriptions which the Achemenid kings, Darius in particular, set up at various points in the Empire to commemorate their victories and glorify the gods whose help had renewed their power. Frequent attempts have been made to prove by them that the Achemenids were Zoroastrians. If we could apply this proof, it would lead us to con-

sider in a new light the origin of the beliefs which the Greeks attribute to the Persians. No such application is possible, and one wonders what can support such a vigorous conviction as that of Ed. Meyer for whom the Zoroastrianism of Cyrus, Darius and their successors « cannot be doubted by an unprejudiced mind<sup>1</sup> ». The information supplied by the inscriptions may be reduced to the following :

1. Darius boasts of having established his empire and suppressed rebellions « with the help of Ahuramazda and all the gods ».

2. He reconstructed the âyadanâ, sanctuaries which the false Smerdis, the mage Gaumâta, had destroyed in his attempted usurpation.

3. Xerxes mentions Anâhita and Mithra side by side with Ahuramazda.

That is all. There is no gainsaying the omission, not only of Zoroaster which indeed would prove nothing, but of anything which might give these proclamations the Zoroastrian colour with which for example the pehlevi inscriptions are stamped. How can one admit of no allusion being made to the cardinal virtues of the faithful Zoroastrian,

1. Ed. Meyer, in *Encycl. Britannica*, 11 th ed., s. v. *Persia*, p. 205.

to any of those deified abstractions « the immortal saints » who divide among themselves the realm of moral good and material benefits. For the expression « and all the gods » obviously does not concern them, and the Persian names in *arta* do not imply them either, though this has been wrongly sustained <sup>1</sup>. In the revolts, perjuries and crimes of the rebels, would not a Zoroastrian have denounced the enterprise of the Spirit of Evil, Ahra Manyu (Ahriman)? We shall be told that the use of the verb *druj* (to lie) to condemn the misdeeds of the rebels, by recalling the Avestic *Druj*, the demon of evil, brings the two conceptions together. Quite the contrary: if Darius used the word *druj* without alluding to the *Druj* or to any of the figures in which the spirit of evil is incarnated for a Zoroastrian, when the supposed belief would have made such an allusion obvious, it is certain that he was having recourse to a more forceful word than our « lie », since it connotes all kinds of disloyalty, but one which derived its strength not from a definite religious symbol, but from the aversion that the Persians notoriously felt for any form of falsehood.

1. Moulton *op. cit.* p. 109.

Let us admit further that we cannot argue from the silence of the texts. But the actions of these same Achemenids bear out their beliefs. Cambyses ordered publicly people to be buried alive and the body of Amasis to be burnt, and if Herodotus says expressly that he gained the censure of the Persians, it was through the pollution he inflicted on the fire, and not through the burning of the body <sup>1</sup>. The example of India shows that cremation and fire worship are not contradictory. The kings of Persia had tombs depicted by the ancients, and the description Aristobulos gives of them is confirmed by the excavations at Susa <sup>2</sup>. To claim <sup>3</sup> that they did not contravene Zoroastrian principles by having themselves buried, some in a mausoleum with thick walls, and others in a tomb hewn out of solid rock, is assuredly a mere joke. We have already said (p. 32) that the custom of casting bodies to birds and animals was Medic and Northern in origin, and that burial, on the contrary, was Persian, and was only abandoned slowly and undoub-

1. Herod. III, 16.

2. Ap. Ctesias, *Anab.* VI, 29, 12; Justin, XI, 15; Pseudo-Callisth. 11, 18. Morgan, *Délég. en Perse*, VIII, p. 32.

3. As does Clemen, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

tedly at a late date. A curious piece of evidence on this matter and one that has escaped attention is the following epigram on a Persian slave of the name of Euphrates : « Do not burn me, Philonymos, and do not pollute fire by contact with me. I am a Persian, of Persian parentage, master, and the pollution of fire is more grievous to us than death. Bury me in the earth, but do not sprinkle my body with lustral water, for I also revere streams <sup>1</sup> ».

The names of the gods have also supported a twofold interpretation, but cannot scientifically further the proof of the Zoroastrianism of the Persian kings. As for Mithra and Anâhita whose names occur only from the time of Xerxes onward, no difficulty is raised in general to recognizing that on the one hand, their origin is foreign to the Avestic Pantheon into which they have been incorporated; on the other hand, the fact that the second of these two divinities is not named in the inscriptions of Darius appears to corroborate the evidence of Berosus on the decision of Artaxerxes to establish the cult of Anaitis into

1. Anthol. Palat. VII, 162; Plut. *Alex.* 69, cf. Spiegel. *Eran. Althert.*, III, p. 701, and W. von Bissing, *Bonn. Jahrb.*, 1924, p. 1-15.



the chief cities of his empire. We have already pointed out (p. 28) that Anâhita, the adaptation of a goddess who was probably Babylonian, is a recent introduction into the Avestic Pantheon (p. 63). We know moreover that the tablets of the Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia attest in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the worship of the Indo-Iranian gods, Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and the Nâsatyas. By a recurrence due to the strength of popular traditions, Mithra, witness of the most ancient Indo-Iranian past, has penetrated into the recent Avesta, after being excluded from the Gâthic pantheon. The mention of the Northern Mithra in the inscriptions, far from proving their Zoroastrian inspiration, takes us back directly to the old Iranian religion which we found in Herodotus.

But is not Ahuramazda the Zoroastrian god par excellence and would not his name suffice to put beyond all question the fact that the Achemenides, by invoking him, were referring implicitly to Zoroaster? One is always tempted to think, so close is the connection between Ahuramazda and the Zoroastrian religion, that his worship had its origin there. On the contrary, we have strong reasons for thinking that this very ancient god was merely utilised and brought into

prominence by the Zoroastrian reform. Although hindered here from discussing this difficult question in all its aspects, we cannot fail to observe, as has been done many a time, that the name « the Lord Wisdom » indicates a being of the family of the Asuras, who were known through the Vedic texts in which they become evil spirits, as in Iran the ancient name of « god » (daiva) became that of the demon. His abstract name, Mazdâh, is prior to the reform, to which he does not even owe the essential rôle which has devolved upon him. Against the hypothesis of an entirely Zoroastrian origin, one can bring forward both internal and external evidence.

Old Persian knows only the form Ahuramazda as one word, which as such no longer has the appearance of a compound. On the contrary, in the Avesta, both elements are distinct, inflected independently and appear often in the Gâthâs far apart. It is useless to quote need for a young religion to give a new meaning to old names and also the expressive care of the artisans in verse. It is none the less certain that the elements of the name were still independent, and that the liberty of the Mazdean compilers did not go as far as to break up an ancient compound. The language of

the Gâthâs takes us back then to a more remote stage of religious development. The difference in dialect between Old Persian and Avestic cannot lessen the value of this chronological indication, for no one doubts that Gâthic is much more archaic than Old Persian. Since we are not at present in a position to assign an exact date to the compilation of the Gâthâs, we must be satisfied with regarding them as prior to the fifth century B. C. Now Ed. Meyer, in particular, has pointed out the Medic name Mazdaku in an inscription of Sargon in the eighth century, but he has concluded from it the extension of Zoroastrism into Media <sup>1</sup>. No evidence can support this deduction. The Medic Magi are practically unknown in the recent Avesta, like the Median in general, and on the other hand Darius established his reign by killing a Mage. What the name Mazdaku proves is first of all that the cult of this god was in the eighth century sufficiently widespread for the name to have penetrated into the personal onomastic, and that both elements of his name were distinct. As, on the other part, we have no authority for thinking that Media was Zoroastrian at that time, it becomes likely

1. *Ztschr. f. vergl. Sprachforsch.*, XLII, 1907, p. 15.

that Ahuramazda is prior to Zoroastrism. Perhaps we should even have an older proof of his existence if we might recognize his name in the Assara Mazash which occurs among six gods of heaven and six of hell, in a Babylonian list of the seventh century B. C. <sup>1</sup>. We should have decisive proof that Ahura Mazda is older than Zoroastrism, if we were to verify his existence in an era when one of the principal phonetic changes of Iranian, the development of intervocalic *-s-* to *-h-* had not yet come about. Unfortunately the equivalence does not admit of rigorous justification <sup>2</sup>, and it is not even certain that Assara and Mazash denote a single deity <sup>3</sup>.

Whoever considers the place of Ahura Mazda within the Zoroastrian system, and tries to define his rôle and his connection with the other gods, is soon led to doubt that his priority is from the beginning, and that consequently his personage is the work of a reformer : the god of a theologian rarely resembles one whose character has been modelled by popular belief. The latter is generally represented in the Gâthâs, as the

1. Hommel, *Proceed. of the Soc. of Bibl. Arch.*, 1899, p. 137.

2. See Hertel, *Methode der arisch. Forsch.*, p. 47.

3. There is a Sumerian goddess Manzât, Mazât (Scheil, *Rev. d'assyriol.*, 1925, p. 149).

supreme god. But even there, as in the recent Avesta, there are glimpses of a period and a doctrine in which the power of Ahura Mazda is limited in several ways: by the antagonism which set Ahra Manyu against him in the old Zervanite dualism and confined his power to the good half of the world; by relations of equality which several of the gods maintained with him. Ahura Mazda had sometimes to seek the help of other divinities and thank them for their aid <sup>1</sup>. In the divine assembly he does not always take the first place, and seems less powerful than the Amrta Spantas. Like Brahma, he has passed from a divided supremacy to absolute supremacy <sup>2</sup>, but other gods (Vahu Manah, for example) enjoy the same power and receive the same worship. The expression « The Wise Lords » denotes in the Gâthâs a group of divinities in which Ahura Mazda is included and at the head of which he has been placed, as Varuna is at the head of the Âdityas <sup>3</sup>.

All the positive elements which seemed to supply evidence for a comparison between the Ache-

1. Y. XLVI, 17; XLVII, 6. See Geiger, *Die Amesha Spentas* p. 103 ff.

2. Przyluski, *Journ. As.*, 1924, II, p. 155 ff.

3. Geiger, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

menid religion and that of Zoroaster, show themselves, one by one, to be different and irreconcilable. It is not enough to have pointed it out. It is necessary to add several points of vocabulary, the value of which is often overlooked.

When one knows the importance of the names of the months and feasts, the difference between the Persian and the Avestic calendars speaks clearly enough. The Persian word for « god », *baga*, is unknown in the Avesta, just as the Avestic term *yazata* is unknown in Old Persian. The word for « mage » *magu*, is mentioned only once in a very fleeting allusion in the recent Avesta, probably under a South-Western influence. On the other hand, the Avestic names for « priest », *zautar* and *athravan*, seem never to have appeared in the Persian religious vocabulary. If one adds that the word *magu* is not even Persian but properly speaking Medic, according to Herodotus, one will have a further reason to believe that the name Mazdak has nothing to do with Zoroastrism. The epithet of *mazdayasna* « faithful Mazdean » which is found in the Aramaic papyri of the Achemenid period cannot prove anything more than the mention of Ahuramazda in the inscriptions. It is known, besides, that in the Avesta, the distinc-



tion between the world of good and that of evil entails the use of a vocabulary which differs for each of them for parts of the body and the essential acts of life <sup>1</sup>. Not only does Old Persian offer no trace of this, but it regularly uses terms of which Zoroastrianism disapproved : thus *pat* « to fall » is used in the Avesta to describe the reeling gait of the demons and *us-pat* for their birth ; in Old-Persian *ud-pat* means but « to part from ». The root *mar* « to die » is applied only to evil beings in the Avesta ; in old Persian it is used in a reference to the death of Cambyses. The words, as well as their connotation, are opposed to any comparisons. Perhaps, if sometimes such perseverance has been shown in attempting to prove the Achemenides followers of Zoroaster, it is because one could not help assimilating Vish-tâspa, protector of Zoroaster with Vishtâspa, father of Darius, a comparison which cannot be upheld <sup>2</sup>.

Thus, of all the indications by which an attempt has been made to form the hypothesis of a Zo-

1. Frachtenberg, in *Spiegel Memorial Volume*, 1908, p. 269-289 ; Güntert, *Sitz. ber. der Heidelb. Akad.*, 1914, Abhandl. 13 ; Gray, *J. R. A. S.*, 1927, p. 427-441.

2. The recent attempt in this way by Hertel, *Die Zeit Zoroasters*, is by no means convincing.

roastrian Achemenid dynasty, none will bear investigation. Can one in return establish any connection between the Persian religion of Herodotus and that of the Achemenids? In so far as one can base any conclusions on the evidence of documents as poor as our inscriptions, every appearance is in favour of their identity. Further, this could be foreseen, since there is between the Persian religion according to Herodotus and the Avestic religion the same digression as there was between the Avestic religion and that of the Achemenids.

Ahuramazda, creator of heaven and earth, accompanied by « all the gods », corresponds to the whole order of divinities which Herodotus places under the supremacy of the god of heaven. The very phrase of Darius recurs in the narrative, where « Cyrus sacrifices first to Zeus and then to the other gods. » We have already commented on the late date at which Anâhita appears and the contrasting antiquity of Mithra. The same moral prejudices find identical expression on both sides. Along with the statement of Herodotus about the aversion the Persians felt for falsehood, will be placed the admonition of Darius : « You who will be king one day, beware

of falsehood. The man who is a liar, punish him with a vigorous punishment ». For the value which the Persians attached to numerous progeny, a sign of divine favour, Darius will again be quoted. « If you proclaim my exploits, may Ahuramazda be your friend and a numerous family be born to you. » But, the fact that these ideas recur in the recent parts of the Avesta shows that they form general and permanent traits of the Iranian character, so that the use of *druj*-, as said above, has no demonstrative value. On the other hand, one point on which Herodotus seems to disagree with Persian customs deserves special attention, for it has often been discussed, though not always in a relevant fashion : the question of temples. The evidence of Strabo has been quoted, as against Herodotus according to whom the Persians had neither temples nor images. We shall not repeat the necessity of not combining texts of historians belonging to different periods. The data supplied by Strabo will be examined separately. There seems indeed to be a contradiction between the absence of temples and the way Darius boasted of having restored the *âyadanâ* destroyed by the usurper Gaumata. This contradiction disappears if one observes the distinction between the tradi-

tional, sacerdotal forms and the popular forms of the cult. Herodotus knows only the religion of the kings and the priests. Now, it is known that the Indo-European religion knew neither temples nor effigies. We possess clear supporting evidence of the beginnings of the Roman religion which strengthens the numerous points of agreement noticed between the Indo-iranian religious vocabulary and the Italo-Celtic <sup>1</sup>. It is Etruscan or Greek influence which led the Latins to erect temples and statues. Up to that time, they had been satisfied with assigning to their worship sacred enclosures (*locasacra*, *fanum*). According to Varro for more than 170 years the Romans worshipped gods without images <sup>2</sup>. The evidence of Herodotus which has often been questioned is proved authentic and conforms to an old Indo-European belief. But if the traditional cult did not admit temples and images <sup>3</sup>, popular religion had certainly long since adopted the use of these concrete figures and temples which the Semitic races had built from a very early date. The fact that Darius had restored temples must be looked upon

1. Vendryes, *Mem. Soc. Lingu.*, XX, p. 265 ff.

2. Varro, ap. *Aug. Civ. dei*, IV, 31. See W. Fowler's *Relig. exper. of the Rom. people*, p. 146.

3. As confirmed by Cicero, *Rep.* III, 9, 14.

simply as a measure of religious policy intended to court the favour of the people, and a mark of the tolerance which the Achemenid dynasty showed to all cults living on their empire. Would then a faithful Zoroastrian king, fired with the intolerant spirit which the Gâthâs breathe, have paid such regard to foreign creeds?

In short, when one examines them in their entirety and not with any preconceived ideas, these chapters of Herodotus give us a relatively correct picture of the religion of the Achemenides. Differing from the religion of the Magi and that of Zoroaster at the same time, it is in harmony with Mazdeism only to the extent to which the latter has retained, in spite of the reform, traces of naturalistic beliefs and practices.

## CHAPTER III

### STRABO.

Let us set aside Xenophon who, in his *Cyropædia*, sometimes draws on sources that we know, chiefly Herodotus, at other times transforms history into a fiction to make it serve moral purposes and come direct to Strabo. We are thus passing over a period of about four centuries, for Strabo lived from 63 B. C. to 19 A. D. ; but this interval is not so detrimental to our inquiry as one might suppose. Like all Greek historians, Strabo was indebted to Herodotus for a considerable part of his information. The very continuity of this tradition proves its value, when it has an adherent in a writer like Strabo, who describes with scrupulous accuracy what he owes to personal observation. It was in Cappadocia, the land of religions, that the historian was a witness of the ceremonies



which he depicts as follows, adding what he knows only by reading :

XV. 3. 13. Persian customs are the same as those of the Medes and many others, concerning which sundry have written : I must, however, tell of what is important. Persians, then, do not set up images and altars, but sacrifice on a high place, regarding the sky as Zeus. They honour also the Sun, whom they call Mithras, and the Moon and Aphrodite, and Fire and Earth and Winds and Water. They sacrifice in a pure place after dedicatory prayer, having set the victim by them garlanded. The Magus who presides over the rite divides the animal limb from limb, and they take their portions and depart, assigning no portion to the gods. They say the deity needs the soul of the victim, but nothing more : they do, however, according to some, put a little piece of the caul upon the fire.

14. They make a difference between fire and water in their manner of sacrifice. For the fire, they put on it dry logs without the bark, adding fat from above : then they kindle it from below, pouring oil over it, not blowing it, but fanning it ; any who have blown it, or have laid a dead body or dung upon the fire, they put to death.

For Water, when they have come to a lake, a river or a spring, they dig a trench and slay the victim over it, taking care that none of the water close by may be splashed with blood, since they would thus defile it. Then setting in order the flesh upon myrtle or bay, the Magi touch it with their rods and chant a hymn, pouring a libation of oil mingled with milk and honey, not into the fire or the water, but on the ground ; and they keep up the chants for a long time, holding a bundle of thin tamarisk rods.

15. In Cappadocia, where the Magian tribe is numerous, being called fire-priests, and shrines of the Persian gods are also numerous, they do not even kill with a knife, but by striking the victim with a log of wood, as if with a pestle. There are also fire-temples, a peculiar sort of enclosure, in the midst of which is an altar, with abundance of ashes upon it, and the Magi guard thereon a fire that is never quenched. They enter these by day and chant for almost an hour before the fire holding the bundle of rods, wearing felt headgear, which falls down on both sides for the cheek pieces to cover the lips. The same usages are practised in the shrines of Anaitis and Omanus ; these also have secret enclosures and an image of Oma-

nus goes in the procession. These things I have seen myself, but the former details and those to follow are described in the books of history.

20. They bury their dead after covering the body with wax. The Magi they do not bury, but leave them to be devoured by the birds <sup>1</sup> ».

Many details tally, with certain modifications, with those found in earlier historians, that is to say, Herodotus chiefly. Among all the gods, six (sun, moon, earth, fire, water, wind) correspond absolutely to those of the ordinary Iranian beliefs, in their least Zoroastrian aspects. Without reason, scholars have doubted to identify these six gods with the Amrta Spanta, spirits which are both the symbol of moral qualities and the embodiment of the elements of prosperity. As we shall see, a correlation does unite the gods of nature to these half-abstract, half-concrete figures whose real essence is hardly conspicuous in the Avesta.

On the other hand, Mithra is restored to his rôle of sun god and no longer travestied as a goddess (p. 27). His attributes differ from those of the Avestic Mithra. The latter is one of the oldest gods of the Indo-Iranian community since he is

1. Transl. Moulton, *Early Zoroastr.*, p. 407-410.

invoked not only in the Vedas, where his power is less extensive, but also in the tablets of the Mitanni in the fourteenth century B. C. <sup>1</sup> In the Avesta <sup>2</sup> he is not the sun god ; he is the god of celestial light. Rising before the sun, he crosses the firmament in a chariot drawn by four horses. He has a thousand eyes, ten thousand ears, and nothing escapes him. His rôle of god of light assigns to him twofold powers. He is first of all the god of truth, the guarantor of the pledged word, the protector of contracts. Those who revere him are blessed and their undertakings prosper. From his heavenly abode he swoops down on all perjurers, deceivers and nations hostile to his cult, and chastises them cruelly. Then, as god of light, he is the god of the warm sunshine. His rays aid the growth of living beings and plants. He is invoked under the name of « the lord of wide pastures. » He gives life, increases offspring, rewards by riches and health those who honour him and respect his creations. We realise, therefore, that on the evidence of Xenophon and Plutarch, Mithra was invoked both

1. Cf. Ed. Meyer, *Ztschr. f. vergl. Sprachforsch.*, XLII, p. 25.

2. Dhalla, *Zor.*, *Theol.* p. 106 ff. ; Cumont, *Mystères de Mithra*, p. 3 ff.

in oaths and at the beginning of battles. Even if we knew nothing of this particular cult of Mithra, which the Roman legions borrowed and carried so far away, we should be able to judge importance of his part from the names he has formed<sup>1</sup>, by the dedication to him of one month a year, the seventh, and of one day a month, the sixteenth, and finally by the famous feast of the Mithrakâna, observed throughout Asia Minor, and marked by solem ceremonies in the course of which the king drank and danced, and which was perpetuated after the Arab invasion under the name of Mihragân, at the beginning of winter<sup>2</sup>.

As god of light, Mithra must have been early identified with the sun. In the Gâthâs, he is simply unknown, and in the more recent texts of the Avesta he is no longer the most important yazata. But his exploits and his attributes are extolled again and again. The contrast between his rank and his role is great. Therefore, even if the erroneous mention of Mithra in Herodotus dates back to the very text of the historian, and that Strabo

1. Cf. Justi, *Iran Namenb.*, p. 209 ff. A name *Mitridasta*, « hand of Mithra » has been found in two Lydian inscriptions (Littmann, *Sardis*, VI<sup>1</sup> p. 5 ; Buckler, *Sardis*, VI<sup>2</sup>, n° 23 and 24).

2. Marquart, *Untersuch. z. Gesch. von Erân*, II, p. 134.

was able to correct it with the help of another source or thanks to his personal observation, the conclusions which the text of Herodotus suggested remain unaltered. It is therefore useless to dwell on the recitation of hymns (Yasht), the reverence and sacrifices given to fire and water, which are pointed out by all the ancient writers. Thence follows naturally, in Iran as in India, the injunction to the sacrificer not to pollute the fire with his breath <sup>1</sup>.

It is better to examine more closely the complementary details of the sacrifices : the victim is stretched out on a bed of myrtle, and after the Mage has touched it with a bundle of rods, its throat is cut while the Mage chants a hymn and pours a libation of oil mingled with honey and milk. It is quite obvious that these practices are not Zoroastrian, but, together with the ceremonies described in the recent Avesta, they provide analogies which have been misleading. The bed of foliage, as has already been pointed out, is similar to the Vedic barhish. On the other hand, modern interpreters find a certain difficulty when they come to explain this singular offering in the place of the Avestic *hauma*, to which they

<sup>1</sup> Oldenberg, *Relig. d. Veda*, p. 550.

want at all costs to find a parallel here<sup>1</sup>. However, this singularity is easily accounted for : the libations of milk, oil and honey were part of the ritual of the Babylonian cult, and are prescribed, for example, in the celebration of the Babylonian *akitu*<sup>2</sup>. One cannot decide whether Strabo speaks here in accordance with one of his predecessors or under his own name, but he clearly ascribes to the Magi a rite imitated from Babylon. Thenceforth, the bundle of rods, which at first sight might be identical with the Avestic *bars-man*, can as well have been borrowed from neighbouring populations; the vedic ritual certainly supplied a parallel here, but this bundle of tamarisks is found especially in Babylonian sacrifices<sup>3</sup>. It can also be recognized in the bundle of stalks, a symbol of vegetation, which the figures of the Accadian divinities often hold. Our interpretation is all the more likely, because in the Avestic hymn consecrated to Anâhita, a goddess possibly

1. Clemen, *Nachrichten*, p. 144.

2. Cf. Appian, *Mithrid.* 66; Delaporte, *Civil. babyl.*, p. 185; Pallis, *The Babyl. Akitu Festival*, p. 167; Usener, *Kleine Schriften*, IV, p. 403.

3. Delaporte, *op. cit.*, p. 185; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, p. 142. It must be added that in the Zervanite account of the creation (below, p. 80) the god Zervan holds also a bundle of rods while sacrificing.



Babylonian, she is represented holding this bundle in her hand.

Such a permeation of the Persian religion with borrowings from local cults, borrowings of which we shall have other examples later, may only be understood when one thinks of the circumstances and the place in which Strabo carried out his inquiry <sup>1</sup>. During the two centuries which preceded our era, a strange syncretism of very dissimilar beliefs and rites operated in Cappadocia. After the dismemberment of the Alexander's Empire and the establishment of the Arsacide monarchy, separate dynasties were founded in all the regions bordering on Persia, Pontus, Cappadocia, Armenia, Commagene. The rulers prided themselves on being called Satraps, descendants of those Achemenids whose customs they followed. Ahuramazda, Mithra, Anâhita were for them objects of special devotion. But at the same time they called themselves philhellenic, and made extensive concessions to Greek cults. The classical example is the inscription of Antiochus I, king of Commagene, who reigned about the time of Strabo

1. Cumont, *Relig. Orient. dans le Pagan. rom.* 2nd ed., p. 213 ff.

(69-34 B. C.) The divinities which are enumerated there bear the double names under which they received the homage of this composite monarchy: Zeus and Oromazes, Mithra and Apollo, Hercules and Artagnes. On his tomb Antiochus is represented in Persian costume clasping the hand of Mithra. He boasts his descent from Seleucids and Alexander through his mother, from Darius the Achemenid through his father and calls himself both Antiochus and Mithridates <sup>1</sup>. This syncretism which both the foreign predecessors of the Arsacides and political necessities favoured, began during the great confusion which followed the fall of the Empire of the great Kings. But events precipitated it, they did not determine it. The Achemenids were tolerant to the point of establishing foreign cults in their realm <sup>2</sup>. Further, the variety of the peoples subjected to their power caused the co-existence, within the bounds of their empire, of different religions, which were intermingling and changing even before the fall of the dynasty. Persian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Hellenic, Cappadocian and still other cults extended through concessions to local customs and became

1. Dittenberger, *Orient. graec. inscr. select.*, I, 591 ff.

2. *Cambridge Anc. Hist.* vol. IV, p. 187-188.

fused into hybrid religions <sup>1</sup>. The ceremonies Strabo saw among the Magi of Cappadocia reflect this state of confusion.

The Magi were numerous enough there to fill the town of Zela <sup>2</sup>. Their name, *puraithoi*, «priests of fire », indicates the priority of this element in their beliefs. Strabo mentions elsewhere that « to whatever god the Magi sacrifice, they begin with an invocation to fire ». Furthermore, fire temples have been discovered at various points in ancient Persia. For a long time scholars have compared this name with the Avestic *athravan*, thinking to strengthen, by the agreement of the names, the similarity of the functions and the cult. The resemblance is only apparent and rests on a false etymology. The Indo-Iranian name *atharvan* which, in the Avesta at least, means priest in general, and not particularly the priest of fire, is of obscure formation and has probably nothing to do with fire (*âtar*) <sup>3</sup>. Although the most specious argument of the Zoroastrian comparison is weak, it would be hypercritical to reject any

1. See for instance the list of gods given by Agathias, II, 24.

2. Strab. XII, 3, 37.

3. Bartholomae, *Altiran. Wörterb.* col. 65.

assimilation with the Mazdean cult of fire, which from before the time of Strabo had already been established, together with that of Mithra, in Asia Minor, and the antiquity of which is shown by the name of the Medic province Atropatene. There will be no difficulty, either, in admitting that the head-dress of the Magi closely resembles the Avestic *patidāna*. But here again the ancient rite of sacrifice is distorted as soon as it is transplanted. It would be unlikely to seek, in the slaying of the victim, the equivalent of a Mazdean practice: the Avestic passages, although indefinite, seem to suggest that the sacrifice was bloody. Moreover, the same custom is quoted as Indian <sup>1</sup>.

To what gods were these offerings made? First of all, to Anahita, who together with Mithra occupies a prominent place in Mazdeism. Her praises fill one of the longest Yashts <sup>2</sup>. She is the goddess of sacred waters; her dwelling is amongst the stars. Full of strength and courageous nobility, she advances on a four-horsed chariot and crushes the demons, the tyrants, all hurtful beings. Ahuramazda has entrusted her with the care of watching over creation. All the gods invoke her

1. Strab. I, 54.

2. Lommel, *Die Yāshts des Awesta*, p. 26-44.

and ask of her glory and riches. She assures the fecundity of nature and living creatures, extends her protection to the flocks and pastures. According to the Avesta, she is a slender maiden with noble bearing, who wears a crown of chased gold adorned with stars, ear-rings and a golden collar. She has a very trim waist, an ample bosom, and white arms adorned with riche bracelets. She has golden shoes on her feet, and a sumptuous cloak of otter skin embroidered with gold envelopes her. This picturesque detail in the description, so rare in the Avesta, has rightly led to the supposition that the author of the hymn had a statue of the goddess before his eyes <sup>1</sup>. The Babylonian origin of Anâhita, the likelihood of which we have pointed out, is confirmed by indications of several orders : from Susa and Ecbatana come the inscriptions in which Artaxerxes mentions her name for the first time, and it is at Susa that statuettes resembling Anâhita have been found. Besides, the Avestic form Anâhita, « the immaculate », conforms neither with the Greek Anaitis nor the pehlevi Anâhid, name of the planet Venus, both of which

1. Halevy, quoted by Darmesteter, *S. B. E.* XXIII, p. 53.

have a long *i*. In all probability Anâhita is the resultat of an adaptation, the ancient name of the goddess being Ardvi. It follows that the hymn dedicated to this goddess cannot be prior to the fourth century B. C. and that one cannot explain by the progress of Mazdeism the great extent of the cult of Anaitis. Hellenic syncretism has likened her to Artemis with whom she was confused in Lydia from the first century of our era<sup>1</sup>. According to the regions, she is identified with Mother Earth, Aphrodite, Nanai, and associated with the old orgiastic cults of Asia Minor. Strabo is too brief on this point to allow us to surmise the aspect that her worship had assumed in Cappadocia. But, apart from the preceding details, the procession in which her image was carried, the homage paid to her at the time of the Sakaia, which were celebrated in Babylon and resembled fairly closely the Semitic Akitu<sup>2</sup>, all these traits give her a character foreign to Mazdeism.

Anaitis has for companion a god called Omanes, a name which by general agreement is identified with the Avestic Vahu Manah. Phonetically

1. Keil, in *Anatol. Stud.* presented to Sir W. M. Ramsay, p. 250.

2. Langdon, *J. R. A. S.*, 1924, p. 65; but contra cf. Pallis, *l. c.*

the comparison may be exact, but the place of this personage beside Anâhita creates a difficulty which several interpreters have realised. Vahu Manah « the good spirit » is a colourless abstraction belonging to the group of the Amrta Spantas. He is the spirit of wise inspiration who enlightens man's mind with regard to the good, and dispels his ignorance. He also reigns over an element of material wealth — the flocks. His theological importance is great, but we know that the gods created by Zoroastrian reform had only an abstract and formal existence. Vahu Manah does not stand out as a living god and furthermore he is never associated with Anâhita. These differences lead one to wonder whether the linguistic equivalents may not be illusory and whether Omanes would not assume the name, perhaps in an altered form, of another god.

We are dealing with a country which, like Armenia and the adjacent region, was early subjected to Iranian influence and stamped, particularly under the Arsacids, with a strong mark of Northern Persia, which coloured all aspects of its civilisation. The Armenian language, we know, is permeated with many Iranian loan-words which form the major part of the feudal,



technical, political and religious vocabulary <sup>1</sup>. The Iranian religion was dominant in Armenia. Now, side by side with Ahuramazda and Anâhita, one Iranian god enjoyed the widest popularity : Vrthragna, protector of Iran, god of victory, national god of the Aryas. In the Avestic pantheon, he occupies an original place : he fulfils his part of ruler of the armies by appearing in a disguised form to whoever invokes him. It is thus that he appears to Zoroaster under ten aspects : wind, ox, horse, camel, etc., or that he escorts Mithra metamorphosised as a boar <sup>2</sup>. Popular imagination had worked on this hero whose name is written both in the inscription of Antiochus of Commagene (Artagnes) and on the coins of the Indo-Scythian kings (Orthagno). In Armenia Vahagn was the national god. One of the oldest specimens of Armenian poetry is precisely a fragment of a song celebrating the miraculous birth of Vahagn from the depth of the waters.

His victories over demons and dragons give

1. Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.* I, p. 9; Meillet, *Mem. Soc. Lingu.* XVII, p. 242 ff.

2. B. Geiger, *Die Amesha Spentas*, p. 66 ff.; Lommel, *Yäshts des Aw.* p. 130 ff.

rise to a cycle of legends<sup>1</sup>. We may, then, without improbability, suppose that it is he to whom Strabo refers. Among the very different forms of his name is frequently found the Armenian Varhran, Greek Ouararanes, reduced to Ouaranes in Menander. We would not need an important correction in the name of Omanou to reestablish his identity.

This problem gives rise to another one : the mention of the divine couple Omanes-Anadates. Here again scholars have attempted to find Vahu Manah. Not only for the same reasons as above, must this comparison be set aside ; but it is even scarcely plausible that this Omanes is identical with the preceding one. The first is associated with Anaitis, the second is obviously connected with Anadatos, and both have a common altar. We may infer from this that two different names are disguised under a similar form. Since a long time, and rightly, Anadatos has been corrected into Amardatos, that is to say the Mazdean spirit Amrtât, but without drawing from it the obvious conclusion. Amrtât is, in the Avesta, a

1. Gelzer, *Über armen. Götterlehre* (Sitz.ber. der sächs. Akad., 1896), p. 99-148 ; Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, I. p. 75-78 ; Gray, *Rev. ét. arm.*, 1926, p. 162.

constant companion of Harvatât. This couple, Integrity and Immortality, as J. Darmesteter has clearly shown, wards off from living beings and plants the attacks of sickness and death. Their function destined them to be protectors of waters and plants, to struggle against the powers of destruction in all its forms, and increase the happiness of living creatures. Later they became the spirits who, keeping all creation alive, assure to mortals their daily bread. As protectors of plants they are naturally allied to the goddess of waters and as a matter of fact they are sometimes invoked together. Islam even has kept a trace of them under the name of Hârût and Mârût <sup>1</sup>. In Armenia Haurot and Maurot have come to be identified with plants <sup>2</sup>. If, therefore, we read Amardatos instad of Anadatos, it is difficult to reject an allied correction wich, making use of the form *Arata* <sup>3</sup> given by the Cappadocian calendar for Harvatât, would convert Omanos into Orados <sup>4</sup>.

The other indications supplied by Strabo either

1. Littmann, *Festschr. F. C. Andreas*, p. 84.

2. Dumézil, *Rev. ét. arm.*, 1926, p. 43 ff.

3. See the forms in Justi, *Iran. Namenb.*, p. 361; Gray, *J. A. O. S.*, XXVIII, 1907, p. 355 and art *Calender* in Hastings *Encycl. of Relig. and Ethics*.

4. Modi only has made an attempt in this way (*Athenaeum*, 1912, II, p. 120), but with a different emendation.

repeat those of Herodotus or concern rather the study of social customs, such as marriage between kinsfolk. By limiting ourselves here to the most salient peculiarities of the beliefs, we can appreciate now the evidence of Strabo. The latter did not take the trouble to correlate the facts which he borrowed from his predecessors with those which he noticed himself. Hence a supplementary guarantee of correctness. Nothing proves that the customs described by Herodotus still existed in the time of Strabo, and the texts quoted above lead us to think, on the contrary, that they were no longer anything more than historical ideas maintained and handed down from one writer to another. In so far as we can see a reality, this is very different. The Persian religion of Cappadocia was a kind of evolved Mazdeism in which no more trace of Zoroastrianism is to be discerned. Of the ancient ritual the cult of fire is retained, but mingled with semitic practices. Of the pantheon, only popular divinities have survived, but the forms of their cult, like their feasts, recall Asia Minor rather than Persia. This removed form of Mazdeism is as far from the primitive religion known by Herodotus as from essentially Avestic Mazdeism.

## CHAPTER IV

### THEOPOMPUS AND PLUTARCH

If the chronological distance between Strabo and Plutarch (from 46 to about 120 A. D.) is less than that which separates Herodotus from Strabo, on the other hand, the summary which Plutarch gives us of the religion of the Magi differs more from that of Strabo than the latter differs from that of Herodotus. Moreover chronology is here of only slight importance since Plutarch refers to a certain extent to Theopompus and at least a part of his documentation thus goes back to the first part of the fourth century B. C. The interest of his chapter of « Isis and Osiris » lies in its relative length and precision, and in the fact that it enables us to reconstruct fairly clearly a theology, a ritual and an eschatology.

46. « Some recognise two gods, as it were rival artificers, the one the creator of good things,

the other of worthless. But others call the better power God and the other a daemon, as does Zoroaster the Magus, who they say flourished five thousand years before the Trojan War. Now he called the one Horomazes and the other Areimanius; and he showed moreover that the former resembled Light more than any other thing perceived by the senses, while the latter again is like darkness and ignorance ; intermediate between them is Mithres, wherefore also the Persians called Mithres the Mediator. And he taught them to sacrifice to the one offerings of vows and thanksgiving, and to the other offerings for averting ill and things of gloom. For pounding in a mortar a herb called « omomi », they invoke Hades and darkness; then having mingled it with the blood of a slaughtered wolf, they bear it forth into a sunless place and cast it away. For certain of the plants they count belong to the good God, and others to the evil daemon; and of animals, some, as dogs and birds and hedge-hogs, belong to the good power, and water rats to the bad, wherefore they count fortunate him that has slain most.

47. Moreover they also tell many mythical tales about the gods, such as the following. Horomazes, born from the purest light, and Areimanius,

born from the gloom, strive in war with one another. And Horomazes created six gods, the first of Good Will, the second of Truth, the third of Good Government, and of the rest the one was maker of Wisdom, another of Wealth, and another of pleasures in beautiful things. And Areimanios created as it were rival artificers to these, equal in number to them. Then Horomazes, having extended himself threefold, withdrew himself from the sun by as much as the sun is withdrawn from the earth, and he adorned the sky with stars; and one star, Sirius, he established before them all as a kind of watchman and scout. And having made other four-and-twenty gods he put them in an egg. But they that were born from Areimanios, being of the same number, bored through the egg [here a lacune], whence evil things have been mingled with the good. But there will come a determined period when Areimanios bringing plague and famine must be utterly destroyed by these, and made to vanish away; and the earth having become flat and level, men shall have one life and one commonwealth, all being blessed and speaking one tongue. And Theopompus says that according to the Magi, for three thousand years in succession the one of these gods



rules and the other is ruled ; for the next three thousand years they fight and war and break up one another's domains ; but finally Hades is to fail, and men will become happy, neither needing food nor casting shadows, while the god who brought these things is quiet and rests for a season, not a long one for a god, but moderately long as it were for a man that sleeps. Such then is the mythology of the Magi<sup>1</sup>. »

Plutarch reproducing the doctrine of the Magi depicts all creation then as subjected to the antagonism of two divinities. Probably we must not attach too much importance to the use of « theos » and « daimôn » which appears to correspond to the Avestic distinction between *yazata* and *daiva*. Originally the « daimon » is a divinity of a more complex nature who can perform good or evil deeds, though of a more specialised character<sup>2</sup>. The only thing of importance for understanding the system is the equality of the gods when face to face and the fact that each of them has created half the world. Through Aristotle we have early proof that the Greeks had identified them with Zeus and Hades. Just as Areimanios resem-

1. Transl. Moulton, *Early Zoroastr.*, p. 399-406.

2. Cf. Nilsson, *Arch. f. Relig.* XXII, 1923-1924, p. 377.

bles darkness and ignorance, Oromazdes resembles light « over all things perceived by the senses ». This expression is unsatisfactory in itself and for the parallelism. If a correction might be suggested, the following passage from Porphyry<sup>1</sup> indicates the direction in which it should be made : « The body of Oromazdes is like the light and his soul like truth. »

Between these two gods is Mithra, a position which has earned him the name of Mediator (Mesites). As no Iranian text gives this name to Mithra, we shall temporarily postpone the problem of this appellation.

Both gods receive offerings in accordance with their nature. The very idea of an offering to Ahriman is, in the eyes of a Mazdean, rank heresy. We are then from the very beginning outside Mazdeism. This must be borne in mind. A crowning proof is that offerings made at night are condemned with the utmost severity by Mazdean ritual, which likens them to offerings made to demons, a practice of the « daivayasna »<sup>2</sup>. This condemnation can only be understood if it refers to the rites of a definite belief, of a sect

1. *Vit. Pythag.*, 41.

2. Yt. V, 94; Vd. VII, 79, and *Rev. ét. arm.*, 1927, p. 7-9.

which gave evidence of a worship of the Principle of Evil. In other words, the religion of which we know one essential rite from Plutarch is one of those which Mazdeism rejects as heresy. Mithriacism, for example, has left us dedications addressed « *deo Arimanio* »<sup>1</sup>.

According to Plutarch the invocation to Ahri-man is accompanied by the act of pounding in a mortar the herb called *omomi*. We must beware of correcting the text on this point, as the majority of editors have done following P. de Lagarde. The substitution of the plant *moly* for the enigmatic *omomi* is the device of harassed interpreters and is no better than the explanation of *omomi* by *hauma*; the first is arbitrary, and the second absurd. As will be proved shortly<sup>2</sup> *omomi* is another name for « *amomum* », which is used in the cult of Ahriman as « *hauma* » is sacred to the cult of Ohrmazd. The antithesis between the two principles extends to the details of the ceremonies. Why steep this plant in the blood of a wolf? Because the wolf, associated with the chthonian powers, is the symbol of greed and cruelty. It is sufficient to think of the symbolic rôle of the wolf and

1. Cumont, *Textes et monuments*, I, p. 140.

2. In *Journ. Asiat.* 192

the serpent in Mithriacism<sup>1</sup>. It is assuredly not by chance that in certain propitiatory customs of Asia Minor the wolf represents the evil powers<sup>2</sup>. An influence of Asianic customs may be suspected here. The « sunless place » to which they go to throw this offering obviously recalls the fact that they are sacrificing to the Prince of Darkness.

Since they divide the universe between them, the two principles must have in their respective domains a part of the animal kingdom. The division of the animals into good and evil has already been met with in the religious principles of the Magi, according to Herodotus, and forms the subject of lengthy dissertations in the Vidêvdât. The indications given by Plutarch on this subject cannot then be regarded as very characteristic. To the world of good belong dogs, birds and hedgehogs, which are equally propitious according to Mazdeism<sup>3</sup>. The only animal given as evil is the one whose name is generally translated as « water-rat », without our being able to identify it

1. Tertull., *Adv. Marc.*, I, 13; Lydus, *de mens.*, III, 26; Cumont, in Roscher's *Encycl.* s. v. Mithra, col. 3041.

2. Pliny, *N. H.* XXVIII, 37, 44; Gruppe, *Griech. Myth.*, II, p. 805.

3. For instance, Vd. XXII, 2.

exactly. I am inclined to think of comparing the *enudros mus* of Plutarch with the *mus marinus* of Pliny <sup>1</sup> which describes a sort of tortoise also called « sea rat ». The tortoise is indeed catalogued among the malevolent beings in the Vidêvdât <sup>2</sup>.

The following passage will permit us to specify the nature of the religion which Plutarch describes, excluding the question of its nearness to or remoteness from Mazdeism. The equality of reverence and power which Ohrmazd and Ahriman enjoy, their parallel creations, the struggle with equal forces in which they engage can only be understood in a system in which one is no longer prior to the other, nor his superior, but where they are twin deities, equal in strength. This system is known under the name of Zervanism, that is to say, one in which « Boundless Time » (Avestic *zrvân akarana*) is the Supreme Being which has begotten Ohrmazd and Ahriman.

Zervanism, long regarded as a heresy of no great historical importance which had grown up in the West of Iran about the time of the Sassanids, has latterly attracted more serious

1. *N. H.* IX, 35, 76.

2. *Vd.* XIII, 6.

attention, particularly owing to the discovery of Manichean texts in Central Asia. We know now that Manicheism follows Zervanism directly by making Zervân the creator and ruler of the universe and Ohrmazd his son <sup>1</sup>. Zervân has also extended as far as buddhist Sogdian and Turkish texts, and it is he who corresponds to Brahma <sup>2</sup>. The antiquity of Zervanism appears also to be greater than has been recognised.

A passage from the Gâthâs mentions already the kinship between « the twins » and « Boundless Time » <sup>3</sup>. The rare allusions that the recent Avesta makes <sup>4</sup> to this give the impression of concessions made to a belief that was widespread though somewhat unorthodox. In Greek traditions there are numerous texts illustrating the antiquity of this belief. Berosus, in the fourth century, refers to a mythical king Zerovanus <sup>5</sup>. Zervan was identified with Kronos, and assumed in the images of Mithriacism, the attributes of

1. [Reitzenstein]-Schæder, *Stud. z. ant. Synkret.*, 1926, p. 276-282.

2. Gauthiot, in Chavannes and Pelliot's *Traité manich.*, p. 46, n. 2.

3. Y. XXX, 3. Engl. transl. by Moulton, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

4 They are collected by Christensen, *Et. sur le Zoroastr. de la Perse antique*, 1928, p. 46.

5. Ap. Moses of Choren, *Fragm. Hist. Graec.*, II, p. 502.

devouring Time <sup>1</sup>. The epitaph of Antiochus of Commagene also invoke it <sup>2</sup>. And even if Plutarch does depend here on Theopompus, he takes us back to the fourth century B. C. Without undue boldness, therefore, we may date Zervanism, as a system, from the Achemenid period <sup>3</sup>. We cannot try at present to go further without exceeding the limits of our sphere.

It is especially in a later period that accounts of Zervân increase among Christian writers, Theodorus of Mopsuesta, St. Hippolytus, Eusebius, St. Basil. These writers, while combating all forms of paganism, have sometimes remained its only historians. Groups of faithful Zervanites, sometimes known as « Maguseans » <sup>4</sup>, had flocked into Asia Minor. There they used to tell the story of the birth of Ohrmazd and Ahriman, which Theodorus of Mopsuesta mentioned briefly and attributed to Zoroaster. According to him, « as Time, the source of all things, made offerings that Ormazd might be born to him, he gave birth both to the latter and Satan (Ahriman) ». Fortunately

1. Cumont, *Myst. de Mithra*, 2nd ed., p. 107.

2. Moulton, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

3. Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

4. St. Basil *ad Epiphan.* 358 ; Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 12.



we possess a more explicit version of this in Armenian in the writings of Eznik of Kolb and Elisaeus, in Syriac, in Theodorus bar Khonay's works. The following is Eznik's version which is more complete.

« Men say that at the time when nothing as yet existed, neither the heavens, nor the earth, nor any other creatures which are in heaven above and on the earth beneath, there lived one being called Zruan, which being interpreted is « Fate » or « Splendour ». For a thousand years he had offered sacrifices that he might have a son who would be called Ormizd and who would make the heavens, the earth and all that in them is. He had thus been offering sacrifices for a thousand years when he began to think and he said : « What will be the use of the sacrifice that I offer? Shall I have a son Ormizd or are these efforts vain? » Whilst he was thinking thus Ormizd and Arhmn were conceived in the womb of their mother; Ormizd in return for the sacrifice made and Arhmn for the above mentioned doubt. At that time, therefore, having noticed it, Zruan said : « Two sons are in their mother's womb; whichever of these shall come quickly to me, him will I make king ». Ormizd dis-

covered their father's design and revealed it to Arhmn, saying : « Zruan, our father, has formed this plan; whichever one of us shall go to him quickly, he will make king ». On hearing this Arhmn pierced the womb and came forth and appeared before his father. Zruan, seeing him, did not know who he could be; and he said to him : « Who are you ? » And he replied : « I am your son ». Zruan said : « *You* are not my son : my son is sweet-smelling and light, but you are evil-smelling and dark. » Whilst they were thus talking, Ormizd was born, light and sweet-smelling, and came and stood before Zruan. When Zruan, saw him, he knew that this was his son Ormizd for whom he was offering up sacrifices. And taking the rods which he held in his hand and with which he was offering sacrifice, he gave them to Ormizd and said : « Until now it was I who was offering sacrifice for you; henceforth it will be you who will offer it for me ». Whilst Zruan was giving the rods to Ormizd, and blessing them, Arhmn came before him and said : « Did you not make the following vow : whichever of my sons shall come to me first, him shall I make king ? » Where upon Zruan, not to violate his oath, said to Arhmn : « O false and evil one ! the kingdom

will be granted you for nine thousand years, and (but) Ormizd I have set over you, and after nine thousand years Ormizd shall reign and all that he shall wish to do shall be done. » Then Ormizd and Arhmn began to make living things. All that Ormizd created was good and straight, and all that Ahrmn created was evil and distorted <sup>1</sup> ».

There is the origin of the conflict. It is beyond doubt that Plutarch or his informér, in mentioning, among the legends, the birth of Ohrmazd and Ahriman from two opposing elements, is referring to a zervanit tradition. In any case, the pehlevi text which is the common source of Eznik, Elisaeus and Theodorusbar Khonay, also inspired, besides the Arab Shahrastani, an account of Zervanism given in the little Persian treatise entitled « The Sages of Islam » (Ulemâ-i-Islâm). The following details appear these : « Time is the creator, he is limitless, one can see neither his end nor his beginning... Ohrmazd was lustrous and high-minded, he diffused a pleasant odour, he was beneficent and his power extended over everything good. When he looked into the infernal regions, he saw Ahriman 96.000 farsangs away,

1. Transl. by L. Mariès, *Le De Deo d'Eznik de Kolb*, p. 49-52.

black, dirty, evil-smelling and malicious <sup>1</sup> ».

Ohrmazd manifests his power and seeks to extend it by further creations, to which Ahriman replies by raising enemy creations. It is thus that the former brought six gods into existence. Before examining their attributes, I should like to set forth a hypothesis, which, though not capable of demonstration, has some probability. It is difficult to imagine that, in a universe as yet empty, Ohrmazd should have created first of all six moral abstractions. Would he not need a concrete support, living creatures, before anything else? Was it not for this reason that he next created the stars? There is nothing against the supposition that Plutarch or his authority here confused two groups of six : the first, which actually represented the creations of Ohrmazd, embraced more or less explicitly the six powers which, at all periods were deified in Iran : sun, moon, fire, water, earth and wind. The second group was an enumeration of the abstractions which he quoted. Seeing that the first source indicated six gods only, without naming them, it was easy for Plutarch or his predecessor to interpolate the name of the six abstractions.

1. Blochet, *Rev. hist. relig.*, XXXVII, 1898, p. 41.

So far as these abstractions themselves are concerned, the essential problem is to discover whether they correspond to the six Amrta Spanta, those « Immortal Saints ». This name does not occur until after the Gâthâs, although each of these divinities is mentioned individually in them. They form the subject of a very complete study by B. Geiger<sup>1</sup> who has demonstrated the instability of their grouping, and the fact that some other figures, Arti, for example, without forming part of it, were nevertheless fairly closely allied to it. After a detailed examination, Geiger concludes that their primitive character was abstract. Already in the Avesta, and more and more as Mazdean theology develops, each of the Amrta Spanta reigns over one element of the material world : earth, flocks, metals, etc. Contrary to the opinion of Geiger, I think that their abstract names are certainly Zoroastrian in origin but that each of them has taken the place of a formerly deified element<sup>2</sup>, whose name was abolished, and that their concrete attributes have gradually re-

1. B. Geiger, *Die Amesha Spentas*, Wien, 1920.

2. The fact that in a christian sogdian fragment (F. W. K. Müller, *Soghd. Texte*, p. 84) the word used for « elements » (*Stoikheia*) is *Mardaspanté* proves that the Zoroastrian abstract conception is but a moral adaptation of formerly material names. See now also G. von Selle, *Gött. Gel. Anz.*, 1927, p.

appeared as the reform period became more and more remote. Whatever may have been their original character, they are, from their very names, abstractions : *Vahu-Manah* « the Good Spirit », *Arta* « Uprightness », *Xshathra-Varya* « delectable Royalty », *Aramati* « Devotion » *Harvatât* « Integrity », *Amrtât* « Immortality ». Plutarch gives the following equivalents for these names : Good Spirit, Truth, Good Government, Wisdom, Riches, Pleasures derived from good things.

Plutarch divides these six names into two groups of three. The first correspond fairly well to the Avestic divinities : *Vahu Manah* and the Good Spirit, *Arta* and Truth, *Xshathra Varya* and the Good Government. The three following, enumerated apparently with a certain carelessness and without any definite order, have no exact equivalent in the traditional group of the *Amrta Spanta*. *Aramati* does not coincide with « Wisdom ». The essential attributes of the former are to inspire men with devotion, to cleanse their hearts of evil desires and to engender love of the Master. *Harvatât* could not stand, either, for the god of Riches. We have already pointed out that, together with *Amrtât*, he is the protector of the principle of life, particularly of water and plants

and that he watches over the nourishment of living beings (p. 67). Still less compatible is the last named, Amrtât and « the creator of the pleasures derived from beautiful things ». This periphrasis is moreover singularly obscure and even the translation somewhat uncertain. Several scholars have indeed recognised that it was fruitless to try to trace here the complete group of Amrta Spanta, and have proposed varying equivalents for the last three gods of Plutarch <sup>1</sup>. As the number of the Amrta Spanta is indefinite in the beginning, and the last names of their group are apt to change a little <sup>2</sup>, it might be supposed because of the glaring lack of correspondence, that in the second group given by Plutarch, different divinities are concerned. Once freed from the difficulty of correlating incongruous names, we could try to find their prototypes in Mazdean Iran. Wisdom is perhaps Cisti, from whom Zarathustra begs clear vision and to whom the priests and the prophet's wife pray for the peace and happiness of the country <sup>3</sup>. The divinity of riches can be Arti, who with Parandi, rewards devotion by material

1. Tiele, *Feestbundel Boot*, quoted by Gray, *Arch. f. Relig.* VII, p. 346, n. 2

2. As it has been demonstrated by Geiger, *op. cit.*

3. Dhalla, *op. cit.*, p. 101.



prosperity <sup>1</sup>. Finally, the personification of Pleasures may be compared with Râma, God of Joy, identified also with the god Vâyu, and surnamed « Good nourishment », who represents the charm of life, gives flavour to foods, but has no spiritual function <sup>2</sup>.

Can any definite conclusion be drawn from the mention of the six gods whom Plutarch, following some source other than Theopompus, perhaps Eudemus, has inserted here? If the correspondance with the Amrta Spantas were established, we should have an obvious borrowing from a Zoroastrian account. But nothing is less certain for at least half of the list, and since the origin of Plutarch's information on this point cannot be determined, it might just as well be a question of Mazdeism, in which these divinities have retained a certain spiritual function, side by side with their material attributes. But it is extremely probable, if we may infer from Manicheism, that Zervanism also knew such a set of divinised abstractions <sup>3</sup>. A further indication of this is the symmetrical creation by Ahriman of six hostile deities. There is indeed in

1. Dhalla, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

2. Lommel, *Die Yäshts des Aw.*, p. 149.

3. Chavannes and Pelliot, *Traité manichéen*, p. 48.

Iranian texts a series of demons which are opposed respectively to the principal gods, but almost all of them bear the mark of recent creations. In the Gâthâs, three only are found : Aka Manah opposed to Vahu Manah, Druj opposed to Arta, and Aishma oppose to Xshathra Varya. To this may be added the single mention of Taramati opposed to Aramati. But archaic demonology assigns no definite place to each of these beings; Druj alone is diametrically opposed to Arta. All the others do evil deeds, but are not the opponents of a definite spirit. It is simply later Mazdean theory which has attached to each spirit a demon who strives to ruin his creations. Here we have a proof of a return to a more systematic dualism, perhaps under the influence of Zervanite dualism. For, in the Ulemâ-i-Islâm, Ahriman creates demons antagonistic to the spirits to whom Ohrmazd has committed the custody of his creation. In any case, Plutarch, following either Eudemus or Theopompus, is by no means describing a Zoroastrian doctrine here. More probably, he refers to Zervanism.

Before passing to the episodes of the struggle in which Ohrmazd and Ahriman are engaged, we must return to the role of Mithra « mediator » in

a system whose definite lines and careful symmetry are clearly specified.

The analogies which scholars have tried to find in the Avestic texts to explain the intermediary part of Mithra, are vague and pointless. They have thought of Mithra as guide of the souls in the other world; or of the help that he gives them when they cross the bridge Cinvat; or again, of the position of the sun between heaven and earth; of the mission of Mithra, which is to protect contracts and assure justice <sup>1</sup>. All that does not reach the heart of the problem, which is to discover whether Mazdean tradition makes Mithra the mediator<sup>3</sup> between Ohrmazd and Ahriman and not between something and something else. For the same reason one cannot urge that Mazdean eschatology assigns Mithra a place in Hamistakân, the purgatory where abide the souls of those whose merits and demerits are balanced. This role is simply the result of Mithra's function as judge and does not explain it. Further, sound method does not admit of transferring what results from eschatology into the cosmogony which is the only question treated by Plutarch.

1. Moulton, *op. cit.*, p. 65, 141; Clemen, *Nachrichten*, p. 157.

All proposed interpretations on this point are annulled by their very diversity. To reply to the question always open one must first inquire under what system Mithra was « mediator », whether we may recognise here a Zervanite trait or whether we must turn to pure Mazdean traditions.

There can be no doubt that this trait arises from the Zervanite account of which Plutarch made use. In the continuation of the passage quoted above (p. 79), Eznik describes in a brief and confused way an episode in the struggle between the two gods : « Arhmen invited Ormizd to a festival. The latter arrived, but consented to eat only on condition that their sons should first engage in battle. The sons of Arhmen having overcome the sons of Ormizd, the two fathers went in search of a judge. Not finding one, they created the Sun for this purpose <sup>1</sup>. » Eznik misinterprets the primitive account by abridging it in such a way that the phases of the struggle become obscure. They may be reconstructed as follows : Ohrmazd invites his brother to a feast, that is to say perhaps with a view to peace.

1. Langlois, *Hist. de l'Arm.*, II, p. 377.

Ahriman, who, we must not forget, is the elder, defies Ohrmazd. Their sons engage in a struggle in which Ohrmazd is defeated in the person of his son. They, therefore, seek a judge to settle their dispute : for although Ohrmazd received from his father the right of exercising his supremacy first, he has just suffered a defeat which lessens his power. Thence the appeal to Mithra. Before insisting on the importance of this intervention we should like to point out by way of parenthesis a similarity between this Zervanite account and an episode of Manichean cosmogony. Manicheism has a closer connection with Zervanism than with any other religion.

Theodorus bar Khonay, in his Book of Scholies, tells us, indeed, that the King of Darkness invaded the realm of Light. Then the supreme God, the Father of Grandeur, to check this invasion, creates Primitive Man, who with his five sons (the five good elements) hurls himself against the five sons of the King of Darkness. But Primitive Man and his five sons are defeated and swallowed up by their adversaries <sup>1</sup>. Is there

1. Cumont, *Rech. sur le Man.* I, p. 16 ff.; Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 343. Note also that in the Bundahishn I, 13 ff. Ohrmazd, before fighting against Ahriman, proposes peace to him.

not here a curious similarity between these two myths, both of which relate the struggle of sons for their father and the defeat of Light? The immediate conclusion from this episode is that the mediation of Mithra has there its natural place between the two antagonistic principles. We may go further and transform what is as yet only a deduction based on a changed account, into certainty established by definite evidence. A characteristic of Mazdean theology which has been too little stressed is the tendency to associate with each of the great divinities, one, two or three lesser deities who aid him in his task, carry out the same activities and receive some of his attributes. Some important divinities are thus duplicated and triplicated. For example, Ahura Mazda and Spanta Manyu; Râma and Vayu; Anâhita, Apâm Napat and Ahurani, etc. Mithra also has as auxiliaries Srausha and Rashnu, with whom he judges souls after death. B. Geiger has clearly shown that several of the principal characteristics of Mithra have been transferred to Srausha: the warlike qualities, the function of watching day and night over the just and of combating ruthlessly the powers of darkness<sup>1</sup>. Now in the

1. Geiger, *Die Amesha Spentas*, p. 108 ff.; Lommel, *Yäshts*, p. 87.

hymn to Srausha may be found the following curious passage which Lommel, the most recent translator of the Yashts, finds obscure : « We adore Srausha, master of truth, who watches over the pacts and treaties of the Evil One and of the Most Holy One » <sup>1</sup>. We do not think that we are mistaken in declaring, on the contrary, that this passage is enlightening. Srausha is borrowing a further trait from Mithra. It is Mithra whose place he is taking in the task of assuring that the treaty between the Good Spirit and the Evil One should be respected. The text of Eznik thus receives definite confirmation. At the same time we reach another conclusion the import of which will be obvious : if it is true that Srausha is here fulfilling a function originally pertaining to Mithra, this brief allusion, so foreign to the spirit of Mazdeism, is undoubtedly a trace of Zervanite beliefs in a Mazdean hymn. Our interpretation is supported by the fact that the idea of a mediator between Ohrmazd and Ahriman persists from Al-Bîrûnî, according to Alêrânshahu : « God has made the treaty between Light and Darkness on Naurôz and Mihragân » <sup>2</sup>. From the prece-

1. Lommel, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

2. Al-Bîrûnî, *Chronol.*, transl. Sachau, p. 288 It is not by



ding statement we may, without forcing the meaning, discover the presence of Mithra in the fact that the treaty is concluded at the time of the feast of Mihragân which is sacred to him (cf. p. 55).

If Mithra is introduced here, it is evidently as god of contracts. But what sort of treaty must he make between the adversaries? It can only be a question of the treaty which regulates their succession in the rule of the world and the time which their respective reigns will last. On this point Theopompus gives details which will be examined separately. If our conjecture is correct two probabilities result: first that the authority on which the beginning of the text rests, was not different in meaning from Theopompus; for the equality of the conditions imposed upon the adversaries, as Theopompus points out, presumes the inter-

accident that the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the month, that is the midmost, is consecrated to Mithra. Another curious fact to be mentioned is that in a fragment of a Manichaean hymn found at Turfan (Müller, *Handschr. Reste*, II, p. 77), Mihr (= Mithra) is called « interpreter of religion ». The pehlevi adjective is in the plural, which may be explained as referring also to another name in the beginning of the hymn, which is now lost (Waldschmidt-Lentz, *Die Stellung Jesu in Manich.*, p. 38). It would not be impossible that this qualification expresses an idea akin to that of « Mesites ».

vention of an arbitrator and excludes the partiality of a father. Consequently Eznik and Theopompus may describe two different traditions. That related by the Greek historian probably retains a more faithful trace of the rigorous symmetry with which the Zervanite theologians must have opposed the hostile forces. (Their conflict was thus given a much more vivid and dramatic character than in a religion where Ohrmazd, assured beforehand of the victory, engages in a struggle with Ahriman without risk. The faithful are thus directly interested in the equal struggle of which they are the stake). Eznik seems to certify a tendency to correct the close parallelism of the destinies and balance of the two powers, by according to Ohrmazd, from the beginning, the favour of Zervân and the rule of the world. We dare not, however, insist too strongly on this difference, for it is also possible that Mithra appeared only to watch over the fulfilment of promises which, according to Eznik, were made unwillingly by Zervân. The two versions would not then absolutely contradict one another, at least on this point. But the fact that Theopompus and Eznik assign an unequal length to the reign of the two principles, favours the hypothesis of diverging accounts.

In Plutarch's account a difficult passage follows : Ohrmazd, having trebled his size, travels as far away from the sun as the sun is from the earth. As this detail does not occur in the Avesta, scholars have resorted to analogies that are by no means close : Windischmann and Moulton wanted to find there a trace of the legend of Yima, who trebled the size of the earth which had become too small to maintain all creatures <sup>1</sup>. The resemblance, which is quite superficial, gives nothing tangible for discussion. The comparison, made by Windischmann also, with the three celestial spheres, is more exact. But a juxtaposition of texts is not sufficient. A closer examination enables us to obtain a certain amount of detailed information.

Whereas in the Gâthâs no mention is made of a plurality of the heavens, in the recent Avesta the celestial realm is divided into three superposed regions, the last of which gives access to the Paradise of Light, the abode of Ahura Mazda and infinite Light. In accordance with the division of human activity into thought, word and deed, the three heavenly regions are called respectively that of Good Thought, Good Word and

1. Moulton, *op. cit.*, p. 402; transl. in Lommel, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

Good Deed <sup>1</sup>. More gradually the needs of parallelism demand the creation of three equivalent infernal regions <sup>2</sup>. But it seems to me doubtful that the correspondence of the three celestial regions with the three forms of righteousness existed from the beginning. Thought, word and deed are considered to form an ethical triad comprising the three cardinal virtues. No one of them, however, is more important than the other two. The idea that the three elements lead *successively* to perfection falsifies this conception. On the contrary, the three heavenly regions evidently form three stages in the advance towards happiness, to such an extent that in the Sassanide accounts they have become the realms of the stars, moon and sun <sup>3</sup>. We must admit, therefore, that the transfer of the name of the three virtues to the three heavenly regions is a Mazdean travesty, due simply to the number three — of an ancient, pre-Zoroastrian idea of a triple heaven, analogous to that of Zervanism.

When we consider the important part played by cosmological details in Zervanism we cannot

1. Dhalla, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

2. Dhalla, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

3. Dhalla, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

be surprised that Mazdeism has kept a few traces of them.

Properly speaking Ohrmazd does not create the three heavenly regions, he increases himself threefold. Therefore, it is from his own body that he produces them, it is he himself who is the firmament or the essence of the firmament. The identity of Ohrmazd with the heavens is too ancient not to be found here. But this sublimation of the body of Ohrmazd is not Mazdean. It is simply transferred from Zrvân, identified with the starry sky, to Ohrmazd. We are sure both of its exactness and of its origin, for the idea of the heavenly regions which the god produces from his body, belongs also to Manichean cosmogony. The Father of Grandeur dwells in infinite light but the realm of light is divided into five superposed dwellings which the god also occupies<sup>1</sup>. We learn from the Fihrist that these « dwellings », although outside the god, are his « limbs ». They share his substance. Moreover this contradiction was denounced by Saint-Augustine who asks whether this « terra lucida » is or is not consubstantial with him, whether it is his

1. Cumont, *Rech. sur le Man.*, I, p.9.

dwelling or his creation <sup>1</sup>. It is of little importance to our discussion to know why Manichaeism has five « dwellings » and no longer three. The point is that in both cases the superposed heavenly regions, in whatever form they are represented, are an emanation of the divine person and at the same time have a material and independent existence. Since the sun is placed equidistant from heaven and the earth, there is justification for Plutarch's statement that Ohrmazd departs from the sun as far as the sun is from the earth.

After creating the sky Ohrmazd adorns it with stars, at the head of which he places Sirius to guard and watch over them. This statement has led interpreters astray because it seems to prove that our text, reproducing an Avestic idea, is Mazdean <sup>2</sup>. We find, indeed, in the hymn to Tishtrya (Sirius), that « Ahura Mazda made him master and guardian of the stars <sup>3</sup> ». When all the preceding details have led us away from Mazdeism and Zoroastrianism, is this enough to contradict them? If we look more closely at the Avestic

1. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 9, n. 3.

2. Clemen, *Nachrichten*, p. 165.

3. Yt. VIII, 44; Lommel, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

figure of Tishtrya, we cannot fail to be struck, as were most of our predecessors, with the complex mixture of traditions concerning him <sup>1</sup>. The difficulty of the hymn to Tishtrya is known to students of Iran. This god is, at the same time, a star, a resplendent steed, an inhabitant of waters, and a maker of rain. He is engaged in legendary struggles against the stars and against demons. The different forms of his name are so difficult to reconcile and to explain that a foreign origin has been attributed to him <sup>2</sup>. The cosmogonised system to which he belongs baffles interpretation. We are undoubtedly dealing with a combination of several myths. The most ancient element of this legendary amalgamation is probably found in the astral rôle of Tishtrya. We should notice, moreover, the persistence with which, throughout this Yasht, Tishtrya is declared the enemy of sorcerers. We may regard this as a trace of a very old polemic in which the faithful dispute a god. The hymn repeats with the frequency of a refrain Tishtrya's alleged hostility

1. Darmesteter, *Z. A.*, II, p. 411 ; Lommel, *op. cit.*, p. 47 ff.

2. An unsuccessful attempt by Götze, in *Ztschr. f. vergl. Sprachforsch.*, LII, 1923, p. 146-153. We have to deal with at least two different names : *Tira* and *Tishtrya*, which were confused at an early date.



to sorcerers. From this it must be inferred that in a certain religion the divine star was associated with cosmological and magical speculations, and that the Mazdeans, in order to monopolise the privilege of this cult, made Tishtrya the enemy of magicians and assimilated him, even at the expense of inevitable incoherences, to their own pantheon. Now in what Iranian religion are the observation and cult of the stars practised as much as in Zervanism? Was it not as astrology rather than as religion that the Greeks considered it? In the eyes of Mazdeism the function of Tishtrya as master and guardian of the stars is incongruous. In the Zervanite system, on the contrary, it finds its normal place, since prosperity and fertility are said to come from Tishtr<sup>1</sup>. If we attach any value to this succession of observations we shall have to withdraw from Mazdeism the most striking parallel which it seemed to have in Plutarch's chapter and add another detail to the account of Zervanism.

Although fragmentary, the following passage gives us a portion of a cosmogonical myth whose meaning has also been misinterpreted. Ohrmazd created 24 gods and shut them in an egg. But

1. Cf. the zervanite treaty *Ménôké-Xrat*, ch. XLIX, 5-6.

the 24 demons which Ahriman created to balance them pierced the egg and mingled with the gods, hence the blending of good and evil. The early Greek philosophers, indeed, imagined creation as originating from an egg. But we cannot take into account such vague resemblances. Darmesteter has rightly pointed out that the mention of the cosmic egg appeared in a Pehlevi treatise, the *Mênôkê Xrat*; but the development of Iranian beliefs was at that time too little known for the importance of this comparison to appear. As a matter of fact this treatise is of clearly Zervanite inspiration: it places the world under the protection of Time. In spite of the Mazdean veneer that they have acquired, the Zervanite details have an undeniable authenticity. Consider the following passage: « the heavens, the earth, the waters and all the rest are like an egg, a bird's egg. The heavens surround the earth like an egg, and the earth in the midst of the heavens is like the yolk in the egg <sup>1</sup>. » This text and Plutarch's each give only half of the myth: combined they show us that Ohrmazd shuts into a space enclosed on all sides the whole of good creation including

1. *Mênôkê Xrat*, ch. XLIV 7. (S. B. E. XXIV, 85). — I follow Nyberg's writing *Mênôkê Xrat* « Spiritual Wisdom » (instead of *Mênûk-i-Xrat*). See *Z. D. M. G.*, 1928, p. 217.

24 new gods. To what does this arrangement of the world correspond? We have no direct information. However, it becomes more and more evident that the connexion between the Zervanite and Manichean cosmologies is so close that we may sometimes draw on Manichean accounts, which are more complete, to supply the deficiencies of Zervanite data.

The initial theme of the Manichean account is the assault by the demons on the Realm of Light, as related by Severus of Antioch, who follows a book by Mani himself: the Tree of Life (that is to say, the Principle of Good) does not reveal its light and goodness so as not to arouse the desire of the Tree of Evil (the Principle of Evil). It is enclosed in its glory, for God has fortified the place by means of a wall<sup>1</sup>. In spite of the changes in the ancient conception made by the powerful imagination of Mani, we can trace the idea of an invisible good Principle, hidden from view by an enclosure. The limbs of the Tree of Death, though hostile to one another, unite with a view to an expedition against the Realm of Light and succeed in reaching its borders. Dazzled by its

1. Cumont, *Rech. sur le Man.*, II, p. 103-104; Chavannes and Pelliot, *Traité man.*, p. 20.

brilliance, « they plot against light in the hope of being blended with it. » The myth of the egg is made clear by comparison with this. Ohrmazd creates a closed world in which are placed the gods of the realm of light and the good creation who are thus protected from demoniacal attacks. It is, however, by its very brilliance that this globe attracts Ahriman.

The latter with twenty-four of his agents pierces the egg. Here the account is interrupted and allows us only conjectures on the manner in which the blending of good and evil takes place. The editor of Plutarch supposes that the demons drag the gods from the egg, an entirely gratuitous conjecture. We should admit more readily that they penetrated in their turn and blend with the gods. But great prudence is required here, for Severus of Antioch points out the unexpected manner in which this blending takes place in Manicheism : the Good God, unable to repulse the attack, surrenders a part of his luminous substance to the demons who devour it and are appeased <sup>1</sup>. Without wishing to argue from Manicheism to Zervanism we see that there are

1. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

grounds for hesitation in proposing a definite restitution in this passage.

Furthermore, what is the significance of the 24 gods? Although the mystic numeration is very widely used in these religions, no Iranian text gives an equivalent number and it has only been traced in the Avesta by arbitrary calculation <sup>1</sup>. The figure 24 is then peculiar to Zervanism. Evidently this number is connected with the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which (with the seven planets) produce all good and all evil, says the Mênôkê Xrat <sup>2</sup>. It is not clear why their number is doubled, and there is nothing to prevent our referring it, with Cumont, to the 24 stars of the Babylonian cosmology <sup>3</sup>. However, perhaps Manicheism supplies a closer parallel : around the supreme god are ranged the 12 principal Eons to which correspond the 12 virtues grouped with the Third Messenger, like in Zervanism, « the sun and the moon and those 12 constellations which are called the 12 chieftains <sup>4</sup>. »

1. Jackson, in *Grundr. d. iran. Phil.*, II, p. 641.

2. Ch. VIII, 17.

3. Cumont, *Astrology*, p. 33.

4. *Mén. Xr.*, XII, 5; Alfarc, *Ecrit. man.*, II, p. 34. See chiefly the 30 (= 6 + 24) gods in the zervanite text quoted p. 114, n. 1.

At the end of time Ahriman will perish through the evils which he has brought into the world. This contradicts the Mazdean doctrine according to which Ahriman and his demons will be destroyed by the flood of molten metal (reminiscence of an old ordeal) which will cover the face of the earth and allow only the just to survive <sup>1</sup>. On the other hand the idea is shown to be Zervanite by several passages from the Ulemâ-i-Islâm which unfortunately have been mutilated: « The very fact that the force of Ahriman is diffused among these demons and that they transmit it gradually throughout the world causes it to be decreased..... When Ahriman comes to attack us he makes us suffer and fancies that he is destroying us; but he does not realise that it is his own injury that he is inflicting on us: that is the cause of his death <sup>2</sup> ». On the death of Ahriman the earth becomes flat. The Bundahishn also predicts the disappearance of the mountains <sup>3</sup>, for, it states elsewhere, the mountains arose as the result of an earthquake caused by the

1. *Bund.* XXX, 30.

2. Transl. Blochet, *Rev. hist. relig.*, XXXVII, 1898, p. 45 and 48.

3. *Bund.* XXX, 33. And also Alfâric, *Ecrit. man.*, I, p. 46.

4. *Bund.* VIII, 11.

appearance of the evil spirit <sup>4</sup>. This point is in contradiction to other passages of the same work which speak of the protection which Ohrmazd accords to certain mountains and of the prosperity which the latter bring to the districts where they rise <sup>1</sup>. In the Avesta, mountains have, like the Elburz, a divine character. If we add to this the custom of sacrificing on the top of mountains, we may conclude that the Mazdean doctrine associated mountains with the good creation. The contrary belief which is found again in the Bundahishn and Plutarch may then be attributed to Zervanism. The continuation of Plutarch's text helps us to understand that the mountains by separating men impede mutual understanding. Their disappearance will herald the establishment of a single kingdom and a single language throughout the world.

This brings us to one of the central conceptions of Zervanism : the duration of the reign of Ohrmazd and Ahriman, since their father Zervân decided that they should reign in turn. Theopompus says literally that each of the gods will reign in his turn for three thousand years and for another three thousand years each will try to des-

1. *Bund.* XXXIV, 1. Moulton, *op cit.*, p. 213-214, has also seen the contradiction.



stroy the work of the other. Must we recognise here the Long Period of twelve thousand years which the Bundahishn assigns to the universe between the creation and the resurrection?<sup>1</sup> Although the data are not clear, the text of Theopompus seems to admit of only one interpretation: the words « in turn » refer to « the three thousand years », that is to say, it is a question of two periods of three thousand years followed by another of the same length occupied by the struggle of the gods, at the end of which Ahri-man will be finally vanquished. This makes a total of nine thousand years. In attempting to harmonise this calculation with the twelve thousand years of the Bundahishn scholars have considered the figure nine thousand impossible<sup>2</sup>; they thus lose sight of the properly Zervanite tradition according to which nine thousand and not twelve thousand years will elapse before the defeat of Ahriman. The Zervanite treatise *Mênôkê Xrat* is precise: « A treaty covering nine thousand years was concluded in Boundless Time bet-

1. *Bund.* I, 8 and 20.

2. Junker, *Aionvorstell.*, p 172, n. 83. I could not consult Söderblom's paper in *Dastur Hoshang Memor.* Vol. quoted by Junker.

ween Ohrmazd and Ahriman. As long as it is not entirely fulfilled neither may alter it nor act contrary to it. When the nine thousand years are over Ahriman is reduced to complete powerlessness..... And all will become peaceful as in the beginning <sup>1</sup>. » Eznik expresses the same idea. « Zervan so as not to break his oath said to Ahriman : 'Oh false and malevolent being, I grant you a reign of nine thousand years and afterwards I will establish Ormizd king over you. After nine thousand years Ormizd will reign and do whatever he wishes <sup>2</sup>. » Likewise Theodore bar Kohnay : « Zervan said to him : Get thee hence, Satan! I have made thee king for nine thousand years and I have made Ohrmazd co-ruler with thee. After this period I will give the kingdom to Ohrmazd and he may do whatever he wishes <sup>3</sup>. » Between this period of nine thousand years conceded as a whole to Ahriman and the version of Theopompus which divides the period into three, there is no contradiction. The dominion which Ohrmazd exercises from the fourth to the sixth millenary is limited, diminished by that of Ahri-

1. *Ménôké Xrat*, VIII, 11.

2. See above, p. 81.

3. Pognon, *Inscr. mand. des coupes de Khouabir*, p. 163.

man which precedes it, and the period of conflict which is to follow it. Ohrmazd must fight against the evil creatures with which his enemy has filled the universe, as well as look forward to the danger to his own works at the time of the struggle between the two Principles. In this even division of the whole space into three periods of three millenaries, it is really Ahriman who has the advantage. One cannot help thinking of Manichaeism which gives the initial victory to the Principle of Evil during the first epochs of creation <sup>1</sup>.

These remarks will perhaps make us understand better the rather incoherent account which the Bundahishn gives of the conditions fixed on Ahriman by Ohrmazd. Obviously the Mazdean tradition is a distorted Zervanite belief. By making this our starting point it is not impossible to disentangle the original elements. According to the Mazdeistic tradition of the Bundahishn, as we have seen, it is a period of 12,000 years which is occupied by the alternate reigns of the two Principles. That, however, is a late arrangement, for the three thousand years which were added to the

1. Above, p. 90.

nine thousand of Zervanism seemed difficult to employ and were placed before all creation : that is the original period when nothing was endowed with thought or movement <sup>1</sup>. Moreover, Mazdeism could not make Ohrmazd and Ahriman twins possessed of equal power. Zervân is therefore omitted as father of the two Principles and Ohrmazd is given the privilege of omniscience whereas Ahriman, whose evil designs do not escape Ohrmazd, must remain in ignorance of the latter's intentions. Ohrmazd, knowing that Ahriman is going to refuse, asks him to assist his creatures and to pay him homage. Ahriman does not consent. Ohrmazd, therefore, proposes to him a war of nine thousand years : for three thousand years the will of Ohrmazd alone is accomplished, for three thousand years Ohrmazd and Ahriman are opposed, finally during the last three thousand years Ahriman is reduced to powerlessness and parted from all living creatures <sup>2</sup>. It is clear that is a clumsy reconstruction with certain borrowed elements, of an episode which was originally entirely foreign to Mazdeism. The struggle of nine thousand years which Ohrmazd proposes to his

1. *Bund.* Ch. XXXIV, 1.

2. VIII, 11.

adversary is the original element. But the Mazdean theologians wished to avoid paying homage, even indirectly, to the power of Ahriman and have so altered the sense of the three periods of three thousand years that the account becomes contradictory. Is there really a *struggle* of nine thousand years when Ohrmazd reigns alone for the first three thousand and has defeated his enemy for the last three thousand? Only the intermediate period of three thousand years is in accordance with the proposal. Besides this contradiction we must point out that which exists between the twelve thousand years of the orthodox tradition and the nine thousand which appear here, as in all the texts of Zervanite inspiration. By taking into account these latter and the ancient elements of the Bundahishn passage it is possible to reconstruct the phases through which the world passes during the dispute between the two Principles : the first three thousand years are attributed to Ahriman, the following to Ohrmazd and the last are occupied by the struggle from which Ohrmazd will emerge the final conqueror. This reestablishes the agreement between Theopompus and the scattered evidences of the Zervanite doctrine borne out directly or indirectly by the Mazdean treatises.

Theopompus adds that, after this struggle, men will enjoy happiness and will no longer feel want nor cast shadows. This last detail, of which there is no mention in Iran, has appeared strange; it simply means that Ohrmazd, living in the centre of light, will shed his infinite brilliance over the redeemed world. Shadows, which being a form of darkness arise from Ahriman, will be banished for ever. The god whod has brought all this to pass, that is Ohrmazd (and not Saushyant as in Mazdeism) will then rest for a time « comparable to the repose of a sleeper. » For the moment we can make nothing of this phrase which has probably been altered and is somewhat obscure. Perhaps it is an allusion to the pause which separates the long Periods <sup>1</sup>. Moreover, as has been pointed out above, according to the Mênôkê Xrat, everything after ther defeat Ahriman will regain its original calm.

For a correct interpretation of Plutarch's chapter only a few traits of which had been recognised as Zervanite, we have had to make a careful analysis of all the significant details. In spite of several obscurities due to the insufficiency of our information, the whole text must henceforth be

1. Junker, *Aionvorstell.*, p. 145-146.

regarded as an authentic and ancient exposition of Zervanism. By Theopompus who is quoted, and by Eudemus who perhaps inspired it, it takes us back to the fourth century B. C. By Theodor of Mopsuesta, Eznik, and Theodor bar Khonay, whose evidence we have examined, we are taken back to the fourth, fifth and seventh centuries A. D. Throughout this time and in several traditions it is always Zervanism that we find.

Time, indeed, is not mentioned in Plutarch, but that does not imply that it is unknown. Apart from the exact text of Eudemus quoted by Damascius on Time or Space, father of the two principles, we may mention on the one hand Aristotle, who assigns the origin of the world to an excellent Principle. Granted that Aristotle himself, in his treatise on Philosophy, admitted the co-existence of Oromazdes and Areimanios, the first Principle cannot be other than Time. On the other hand, the Magi, according to Diogenes Laertes, had certain divinities which were both male and female <sup>1</sup>. We must understand this peculiarity to apply to Zervân alone, for it is emphasised by the sarcastic Christian arguments against Zervanism in the

1. Diog. Laert. *Prooem.* I, 7.



Acts of Anâhîdh : « How can you say that Fire and the Stars are children of Hormizd conceived and begotten by him or by another ?..... If Hormizd has conceived and begotten within himself, he is androgynous, like his father Zervân, as the Manicheans say. <sup>1</sup> » This is indeed the peculiarity of Zervân. It is in the later development of the doctrine that the god received a wife whose name, moreover, is uncertain <sup>2</sup>.

The Greeks, then, attributed to Zoroaster and the Magi from an early date the doctrine of Boundless Time which had become so familiar to them that, as Junker has rightly pointed out, it influenced their conception of the Aion. Some light is thus thrown on the antiquity and importance of Zervanism in Iran. From the fact that the Gâthâs of the Avesta, while repudiating strict dualism, speak of the twin Principles, it follows that Zervanism is pre-Zoroastrian. The recent Avesta is largely indebted to Zervanism, though

1. Nöldeke, *Festgruss an R. von Roth*, p. 37; Mariès, *Le Deo d'Eznik*, p. 46; Nau, *Rev. hist. relig.*, 1927, p. 189.

2. Nöldeke, *l. c.* p. 73. This name, whatever it may be, must correspond to that of the « Mother of Life », *Ramratux* (Jackson, *J.A.O.S.* 1924, p. 61; Waldschmidt-Lentz, *Jesu in Man.*, p. 90).

all these debts have not yet been recognised. The Mazdean treatises present undoubtedly Zervanite versions of the creation. But even before the Sassanide period, the Mazdean priesthood felt the powerful competition of this belief and directed more and more violent attacks against it. With ever greater precision, orthodox theology denounced the double heresy of believing in the equality of evil and good, and of giving way to a fatalism engendered by the religion of all powerful Destiny <sup>1</sup> ; but Mazdean spiritualism, which really triumphed only when Mazdeism was established as a state religion by the Sassanides, had not been able to prevent Zervanism from giving rise to two new religions — Mithriacism and Manicheism — or at least furnishing their essential elements.

Of this reaction we know only the officially declared phase ; but it must have begun in another form much earlier. One does not sufficiently recognize how difficult it was for a religion which desired to make the Good Principle superior to the Evil to uphold Mazdean dualism. Theologians fell between logic and orthodoxy. Hence

1. Transl. of. the pehlevi texts by Christensen, *Et. sur le Zoroastr. de la Perse ant.*, p. 55.

the compromises which introduce Zervanite ideas into Mazdeism; hence also the embarrassment of the ancient Parsee doctors in defining the power of Evil or the rôle of Time <sup>1</sup>. It may be said without exaggeration that Mazdeism is dualistic in so far as it is Zervanite. We come then to understand the existence in primitive Iran of several religions whose ancient aspect and exact relation largely escape us. Apart from the cult inherited from the Indo-Iranian past, Iran knew formerly a religion which made Time the Supreme Being. Therefore, it was not only against the nature cults that the reform of Zoroaster must have been directed, but also against Zervanism, though in a less direct manner : Zoroastrian teaching merely departs from Zervanite principles which later it will attack.

Since Zervanism was observed by the different peoples which border on the West of Iran, and perhaps also because it assigned an essential place to the stars (a trait in which we must probably recognise a very ancient influence of Babylon), it is likely that this religion, whatever may have been its place of origin, developed espe-

1. Junker, *Aionvorstell.* p. 132.

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cially in the west of Iran. The difficult question of discovering why, among the Greeks, it has always been associated with the name of Zoroaster, is bound up with the other problems which concern the reformer and which we have purposely avoided.

## CONCLUSION.

We have not studied minutely all the Greek texts relative to the Persian religion; but in what we have had to neglect there is nothing which contradicts any of the principal evidences to which this study is restricted and nothing which adds very much to them. If we confine ourselves thus to the most important data, it is possible to formulate definite conclusions.

The person of Zoroaster and the teaching of the Magi exercised over Greek ideas an influence which was real, though difficult to measure. Later the Hellenistic conception of the Aiôn shows the elaborate result of a much more ancient spiritual contact. But it does not follow that the Greeks knew a *single* form of Persian religion. The method which we have adopted has brought out the differences between the ancient nature religion which gradually evolved and which is described by Herodotus; the degenerate Mazdeism which Strabo observed; and the Zervanism which Plutarch knew through Theopompus and perhaps

through Eudemus, each of these religions belonging to a different period and perhaps to a different region.

Neither Greeks, Syrians nor Armenians knew anything of the Avestic Zoroaster nor of his teaching as expressed in the Gâthâs. This fact must be firmly established. As it would be beyond the range of our subject to enquire into the causes of this, it will be sufficient to point out that we have a propensity to exaggerate the ancient extent of Zoroastrianism. In all probability Zoroastrianism was in the beginning only a local movement, limited to a region of Eastern Iran not yet defined; it met with powerful opposition from the established beliefs, and remained a long time without gaining a real hold. As it spread it changed. It became mingled with the cults which it had attempted to replace and it is in a very different form that Mazdeism reached Western Iran.

The great service that the Greek historians render is to help us to imagine the religious activity, the variety and complexity of the innovations where we should be inclined to see only dogmatic uniformity and lifeless tradition.

## ERRATA

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- P. 74, n. 2. Instead of : 192.      read 1929.
- P. 83, n. 2.    »    »      1927, p.,    »    1927, p. 437.
- P. 92.            »    »      Alêrânshahu » Alêrânshahrî.
- P. 115.          »    »      ben      »      been.



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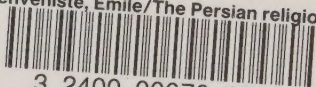
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